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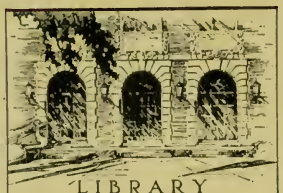
of
Curgenven.



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MRS. CURGENVEN
OF CURGENVEN

VOL. III.

MRS. CURGENVEN

OF CURGENVEN

BY

S. BARING-GOULD

AUTHOR OF 'IN THE ROAR OF THE SEA,' 'URITH,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

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MRS. CURGENVEN.

CHAPTER I.

A NEW PROPOSAL.

No ladies called on the new Mrs. Curgenven. Gentlemen came to show courtesy to the squire, and clumsily apologized for their wives. One had a bad cold; another was visiting friends in town; the horses of several were indisposed; bereavement held others at home.

The rumour had circulated, whence and by whom started none could say, that the new Mrs. Curgenven was of doubtful character. It was asserted that she had been a ballet-dancer. How the ladies who made this assertion came to hold that opinion and formulate it is not easily explained, as none of them knew anything whatever about Theresa's past life. Moreover, such of their husbands as had seen her, had protested that she was a perfect lady, of very charming manners and

engaging appearance. Perhaps it was this fact that went against her. All the married ladies held as tenaciously as they did to the Athanasian Creed, that their husbands were easily deluded by pleasant features and a little flattery. Not one would allow that her husband had discernment and good taste except in that spasmodic moment when he made the choice of herself. The more the gentlemen expatiated on the amiable manners, the handsome face, the graceful courtesy of Mrs. Curgenven, the more enrooted became the conviction in the bosoms of their ladies that she was a designing and unprincipled woman. That she was in bad form they concluded because she had succeeded and displaced Mrs. Curgenven the dowager. Jane was everything that society could desire : she was a woman of irreproachable morals, of the most formed manners in the most approved mould. She was a woman of sound sense and clear understanding. She was a woman of whom everything was known, from her birth till her bereavement. In every stage of life she had behaved well. She had been excellent as a hostess, admirable as a manageress of bazaars and charities ; she had never said a word that was lacking in good feeling, never done an act that was tactless. In her house, as wife, mother, mistress, she was unapproachable. The praises of Mrs. Jane Curgenven were sung on all sides over every breakfast and dinner-table ; she was danced before the eyes of

sleepy husbands in curtain lectures, she was held up in the school-room to young girls entering on life to be admired and striven after as a pattern, and everywhere and always the laudation of Mrs. Lambert carried with it the sometimes tacit, more often outspoken condemnation of Mrs. Percival. The very fact that there were two Mrs. Curgenvens of Curgenven forced them into comparison with one another; and when one Mrs. Curgenven had the advantage of being a parson's daughter, of having been known for many years to all the aristocracy of the neighbourhood, and hugged to its bosom, whereas the other Mrs. Curgenven had dropped suddenly from the sky, or come up from the other place, and nothing was known either of her origin or of her acquaintances; then, naturally enough, all the favour rolled into the scale of Jane, and none was available to weight that of Theresa.

The latter was fully aware how matters stood. She had waited in curiosity and hope for a week or two expecting visitors, but as no ladies came, the consciousness was forced upon her that society had pronounced against her.

Percival was impatient and angry. He could not bear in silence the slight cast on his wife. He stormed and grumbled; he fretted and found fault. He rushed off to the rectory to demand an explanation from Jane, but Jane declined to give him any. He denounced her as having set the neighbours against

his wife. She repudiated the charge with indignation and with justice. She had not said a word against Theresa. When neighbours had asked questions relative to the new squiress, or turned the conversation to her in Jane's presence, she had maintained the strictest silence; she had refused to be drawn to express an opinion concerning Percival's wife.

What was to be done?

Percival vowed he would leave Curgenven next winter and go to Italy, the Riviera, anywhere to be out of the ostracism that had fallen on his wife, and through her on him. He could not go to dinner-parties to which she was not invited. He could not invite neighbours to his table, knowing that his invitations would be accepted by gentlemen only.

Yet it must be allowed that those gentlemen who did come to Curgenven tried their best, by deference and kindly civility to Mrs. Curgenven, to make up to her for the abstention of their wives; but they could not ask her to their houses, and all their efforts to persuade their womenkind to call on Mrs. Curgenven only deepened and intensified their mistrust of her.

The servants noticed that there were no lady callers, and commented on it. They began to entertain doubts as to the respectability of their mistress, to form romances concerning her early life, when she had been a stage-player, as they said.

The villagers talked, they eyed the new squiress with suspicion, but waited to see whether she was liberally disposed before deciding finally as to her claim to be a lady.

Theresa offered the rector to take a class in the Sunday school. He passed his fingers through his white whiskers, and with many polite and unctuous speeches declined her services. There really was not a class that was not provided with a teacher. It would positively be the imposition of too heavy a task upon her.

Theresa was not one who cared for society. She lived much wrapped up in herself, and was happy to have books to read, beautiful objects about her, and a husband whose whims and pleasures she might consult. But the isolation in which she was placed wounded her; it grieved her specially because it annoyed Percival, and debarred him from taking his proper position in county society.

Theresa was in the bungalow smoking-room thinking of these things when Physic entered.

'Glad to find you here, madam—and alone,' said he.

'Mr. Curgenven is out. I presume it is he whom you wish to see.'

'I am come on business.'

'As I said, he is not at home.'

'Precisely, but my business is with yourself.'

'Indeed!'

'You were so good as to furnish me with promptitude the sum I had demanded. For that I am obliged. Circumstances have occurred, over which I have no control, that place me in extreme pecuniary difficulties, and oblige me immediately to find a sum of money that I am unable unassisted to raise.'

'I quite understand to what this leads,' said Theresa haughtily. 'Because you have been able to wring from me three hundred pounds, you are resolved to wring some more.'

'It is a case of necessity.'

'It is a case of the horse-leech,' retorted Theresa. 'You will not let go till you have taken all you can.'

'When a man is driven to his wits' ends for money——'

'He loses all scruple, that is, supposing he had any scruples to lose.'

'You put things in a very harsh light.'

'The case stands thus,' said Theresa, her angry blood swelling her veins. 'You have determined to get from me all you can at the risk of causing misery to me by estranging my husband from me. Do your worst. You shall have no more.'

'I do not understand you.'

'I spoke plainly enough. I will not be tortured thus. It

was to me inexpressibly painful to extort from Mr. Curgenven the sum you required. I did it, but I will not do it again.'

'Very well,' said Physic. 'Then you know the consequences. I shall produce the will.'

'As you like. But I do not believe you will do it. What have you to gain? Now, you are agent for this estate, not without some advantage to yourself. Do you suppose you will retain the agency when it passes to Mrs. Jane Curgenven? If what I hear be true, she was constantly urging Captain Curgenven to take it from you and give it to the Smiths, who are said to be worthy and upright men. When the estate is hers, will she retain you as her factotum? I doubt it. So do you. If you prove that will, you lose what is worth something not inconsiderable. For that reason you will not do it.'

Physic looked at Theresa with a blank expression, but speedily recovered himself.

'What is this agency worth that I should care for it? If I tell Mrs. Jane that I can give her the estate and house, I can make it a proviso that I am kept in my place, and that I receive some consideration for my services in helping her into her own.'

'No, you will not. She will not thank you to be proclaimed no wife of Captain Curgenven, and her child to be illegitimate. She will owe you a grudge and not a debt.'

'We shall see.'

'Yes, we shall see. If this is all you have to say to me you may go.'

'And you will drive me to use the will?'

'You will not use it. You are too well aware of your own interest to do so. I tell you that I had rather be in poverty again than endure the torture to which you subject me, and the risk of forfeiting my husband's love.'

'Come, come, do not be so hot!' said Physic, assuming a conciliatory tone. 'You know that we are old friends.'

'Indeed! I know nothing of the kind.'

'Some consideration is due to me as an old admirer.'

Theresa pointed to the door. 'Leave me. Do your worst.'

'I will not go. I will not leave you in anger against me. Upon my soul I do not desire to cause you annoyance. I would give you back the will most readily if I could afford it. I do not wish to drive you out of Curgenven. I do not wish to see Mrs. Jane come in, with her nose in the air. I ask but a reasonable thing. Here you are in possession of a fine estate worth four thousand a year, and, as you know very well, you hold it only because I do not produce a certain document. That document you put into my hand and you read what was written on it. I was empowered to use it or suppress it, as I saw fit.'

'I do not suppose that this has any legal authority, and that you are really justified in retaining it.'

'I am the best judge of that. Suffice it, between you and me, that you are mistress of Curgenven because I use the right given me by the writer of that paper. It stands to common sense that I should be considered for what I have done. I have done you a vast favour—worth four thousand a year—and now that I am in dire need for money I may with fairness ask you to let me have a little help.'

'A little help! You have had three hundred pounds.'

'What is three hundred to four thousand a year for, say, ten years? Four thousand for ten years is forty thousand pounds, and you offer me three hundred! I spit at the offer. You would give me a dog's pay for my services. I will be treated like a man.'

'Then do your worst, Mr. Physic. We shall know what to expect.'

'Beggary, utter beggary.'

'Not beggary—poverty, perhaps.'

'Poverty most assuredly. And then—how will Mr. Percival find himself in poverty? You know that there is no work in him, no stability. He never earned an honest penny in his life. He can sponge—that is all he can do.'

'If we come to poverty we shall have to shape ourselves to

our new quarters. That will be our concern. Tell me, once for all, what your demand is, so that this will may be delivered into my hands—into my hands, which in an inconsiderate moment, in this room, confided it to you.'

'A thousand pounds.'

'That is to say, seven hundred in addition to the three hundred you have received.'

'Oh dear no! It is dirt cheap at thirteen hundred.'

'A thousand stars out of the sky you might as well demand. I neither will ask my husband for the sum, nor, did I ask it, would he give it, not knowing the purpose for which it was given.'

'Let us understand each other,' said Physic coolly. 'You do not want to be further annoyed by me. Very good. A thousand pounds will place you in such a position that my power to annoy you is gone. I do not desire to turn you and your husband out of Curgenven, but I am not disposed to surrender my hold over you for any sum less than a thousand pounds. I should be a fool if I did.'

'I tell you for once and all, a thousand pounds is impossible. Do you suppose that my husband would sign me a cheque for that sum without knowing what I would do with it? I had trouble enough getting him to give me a cheque for three hundred.'

'I am well aware of that. But I know also that he has a Bolivian bond for a thousand. Three hundred and that would serve my purpose; it is about the only security he has.'

'What! you would have me rob him?'

'No robbery at all. It is securing Curgenven and four thousand per annum to him. A very small sacrifice indeed. If you deny me what I want, then indeed you rob him of a fine property, a good income, and an enviable position. If he loses all this, you do it, you despoil him of everything rather than relieve my immediate necessity by handing over to me this trumpery bond.'

'He keeps all his papers locked.'

'But you know where is the key.'

'I will not do it. Nothing in the world will induce me to it. I cannot—will not—rob my dear husband.'

'Then I offer you another alternative.'

'What is that?' Theresa buried her face in her hands.

'There are family jewels, heirlooms, of very considerable value; in fact, worth more than a thousand pounds. These, I presume, are in your keeping. Let me have them. I do not propose to get rid of them, but to raise on them the sum I require; and I leave it to you to get them back by the gradual extinction of the sum raised upon them.'

'Now you propose that I should rob the family.'

'What family? The dead Curgenvens in the ancestral vault, in the family silo? or the Curgenvens that are yet to come? Who will know if these jewels are in other hands for a while? Do you see so much company? go out to so many grand balls, where you would be expected to wear the jewels? Trust me, they may sleep in their cases so long as you are Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven. The county folk don't like you, they will have nothing to say to the adventuress—the soubrette of the San Francisco theatre. No—the drive may be grass-grown for all it is needed for the carriages of the squirearchy of the neighbourhood. You may dismiss the gatekeepers at the lodge, they will not be called on to open to any. The neighbourhood has placed you under an interdict, and as you are under an interdict you will not be required to wear jewellery. If the jewels be away from Curgenven, no one will be the wiser save yourself and me. What does Mr. Curgenven care about these gewgaws? In ten years, by a payment of a hundred and fifty per annum, I dare say you may be able to get them all back into your hands again. Meantime Curgenven is assured to your husband and to you. I leave you a week to turn this proposal over in your mind. Let me see—this day week—where shall we meet? not anywhere near the house. Say at

Tolmenna—on the moor, where we can make sure none will be looking and listening. If you bring the jewels, I will bring the will, and we shall effect an exchange. Till this day week—and then—at Tolmenna.'

CHAPTER II.

OLD AND NEW QUARTERS.

'GET on your hat, Alice. I am going to carry you off.'

'Where to, Justinian?'

'It is too bad; you have not been to the house for an age. I run in here like a tame cat, and you never come to us. By the way, Aunt Jane, you have not been there either.'

'No, Justinian. You must remember my feelings. It would be most painful for me to go there, where I have spent such happy years.'

'But, Aunt Jane, you do not know my step-mother.'

'Oh—I do,' in a chilling tone.

'Alice does not. It is too bad that here she should be so close to the house, and not have been in to make her acquaintance. The step-mother is not a bad sort of person at all—she's rather jolly, in fact, and I don't blame the

governor. So now, Alice, come and be introduced, and make your courtesy.'

'Oh — I — I think Alice has a music-lesson,' said Mrs. Jane.

'No, mamma. Wednesday is my day.'

'But practice, dear. You cannot expect to get on, and it is not fair to your master, who comes out from Liskeard, nor to me, who have to pay half-a-guinea for your lesson, if you do not work for it in preparation.'

'But, mamma, I can prepare at another time.'

Mrs. Curgenven frowned, and slightly shook her head, as a private notice to her daughter not to combat her reasons.

'Besides,' said that lady, 'there are some gathers out in her dress.'

'Oh, that is nothing, aunt. Alice can change her frock.'

'It is not that only; there are various reasons.'

'But what are they?' persisted Justinian. 'It seems to me that Alice is in duty bound to pay her respects to my step-mother. It seems so queer that she should not come to our house and get acquainted with her. I am quite sure Alice will like her, she is such a lady—so true a lady.'

'You are an excellent judge, no doubt,' said Mrs. Curgenven, throwing up her head.

'I think I am,' retorted Justinian frankly. 'You say you know her. Don't you think so yourself?'

'Really, my dear fellow, that is not a fair question. Naturally I cannot say other than that your father has made his choice, and no doubt on excellent reasons.'

'That is not an answer at all. I tell you freely that I did not readily swallow the tidings that I had a step-mother. I was very angry; but when I saw her, and had a talk with her, I found that I had been mistaken; and it is the place of a gentleman to acknowledge when he has been in error, and only a fool persists in his prejudice after he has been shown that he was mistaken. So—there—I have had no proper reasons. Alice, get on your hat.'

'No,' said Mrs. Curgenven, 'Alice was not well this morning. I detected a slight cobweb in her throat, and the weather is damp. I do not wish her to go out. Indeed, I am going to administer bryonia.'

'Mamma, I am quite well!' said the astonished girl.

'My dear, you try to persuade yourself that you are. Stay here—or, no—come up with me to my room. You must have a sip of bryonia every two hours out of my china spoon. Justinian, when bryonia is administered there must be no exposure to damp. Follow me, Alice, at once. Justinian, remain where you are till my return.'

As soon as the mother and daughter were in the hall, Alice remonstrated against being made to take medicine.

'Mamma, I really am perfectly well.'

'My dear, I ought to judge that better than you. You take bryonia to prevent your going to the Manor House. Now go to my room and wait there for me. You can get out the china spoon if you like, it is in the medicine-chest.'

Then Mrs. Curgenven entered the study, shut the door behind her, and said to her father, who was then engaged on the *Contemporary* and a sermon in little dips and alternations:

'Papa, here is a pretty kettle of fish. Justinian wishes to carry off Alice to bow down to and worship that woman, and he has taken me to task for not visiting her. What is to be done?'

'Jane, of course we must be ordinarily civil.'

'I cannot dissemble. If she were in a penitentiary I would cheerfully visit her daily, and I would go without Devonshire cream for a twelvemonth, even in the black currant tart, if by my self-denial I could save her soul; but I cannot, and will not, countenance her at Curgenven.'

'But, Jane, you must remember that she is the wife of our squire, who is your poor husband's cousin. There will be a great deal of talk, and very unpleasant talk, if you hold your-

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self aloof. What can people say to explain your conduct but what is most distressing to think could be said of a member of the Curgenven family?'

'I don't care three straws what people say. I will not regard her as a relation.'

'Then why did you ask my opinion? You have made up your mind.'

'I ask, because here is Justinian at me for not going to the Manor House, and refusing to take any excuse for Alice. I am obliged to dose her with bryonia.'

'Why, what is the matter with her?'

'Nothing; but I must make an excuse for her not going to the house to-day. He will be plaguing me again to-morrow. I can't keep Alice perpetually on bryonia.'

'No, I do not see myself how you can help letting Alice go to the house, and going yourself.'

'Good gracious! My dear father! To *that* woman!'

'Why not? You know absolutely nothing against her. Her manners leave nothing to be desired. She is highly educated. Except that she was a governess, and has no relations, she is unexceptionable.'

'Goodness me! Really, papa—and rector with the care of souls, and hoping to be a bishop! I do not understand this moral obtuseness. But there, men are differently constituted

from women. I believe this—even clergymen rather prefer a spice of wickedness in good-looking women.'

'My dear Jane, you forget the respect due to me—to my age, my avocation, my relation to yourself.'

'I beg your pardon, papa; I was a little hot. I could not help it. What am I to do?'

'There, you ask my advice again, without the slightest intention of following it; nevertheless, I will give it. It will not do for you to hold aloof from the squiress. You will tear the parish into two factions, one siding with her, one with you. Percival will be extremely angry, and will refuse his subscriptions to the charities and bring the organization to a standstill. I shall have to dismiss either the Scripture reader or the mission woman. If I get rid of the former all the Evangelicals will be up in arms, and denounce me as gravitating to sacerdotalism; if I dismiss the mission woman, I shall have all the High Church folk shaking the dust off their feet against me as wholly sunk into the slough of Puritanism. If I am not *via media*, I am nothing. But that is not all. Consider the very unpleasant situation we shall be in with the neighbours. The estrangement will be commented on, and there is simply no estimating the extravagance of the myths that will be formed relative to Percival's wife. You must also bear in mind that Lady Carminow is a woman free

from prejudices and of a very decided character. How do you know but that Lady Carminow may take it into her head to visit and make much of Percival's wife? It is precisely the thing she is likely to do. And if she does this, do you not know that at once the whole neighbourhood, from Lady Tregontick down to every curate's wife, will veer round and vie with each other in courting her? Then where will you be?'

'Yes,' said Jane bitterly, 'Lady Carminow is capable of even that. I never can forgive her laying the foundation-stone of the Ranters' chapel at Cartuthers.'

'This must be weighed. Take my advice, Jane, and be decently civil to Mrs. Percival. Then you can always draw back at any time, or push forward, according to circumstances.'

'That I never will do. Never! I have too much self-respect to push forward with *her*.'

'Very well. Maintain a cold and ceremonious demeanour.'

'A cold and ceremonious demeanour I will, if I can. I cannot call black white; and if society should take up that person, so much the worse for society. I shall be clear of participation. So far—society has taken much the same view of her that I have.'

'Perhaps you managed that.'

'I have not spoken of her.'

'Exactly; and your chilling reception of any word spoken about her has made society suppose that there is more behind the scenes than there really is. You are uncharitable.'

'We shall never agree on this head,' said Jane, 'and therefore had better cease to speak about it. Something, however, must be settled, that I may not be worried by the importunities of Justinian. He has been won over now, and quite admires this precious step-mother.'

'What I desire, Jane, is, that there be no open quarrel. Maintain a semblance of good terms, for the sake of the parish, of the charities, the organization—for my sake. If it be said that there is a quarrel between me and my squire—who is also in a fashion a connection—it may stand in the way of my ministerial work.'

'Very well, papa,' said Jane, after some rumination, 'I will call, and by my manner, I trust, I shall be able to let that person understand, unless she wears rhinoceros hide, that exteriorly we are on speaking terms, but that acquaintanceship stops there. As to Alice, never will I allow her into the Manor House whilst that woman is there. I trust I value my child's immortal soul too highly to submit it to so great peril.'

'Peril—fiddle faddle.'

'You cannot touch pitch and not be defiled. You cannot associate with that sort of creature without a lowering of moral tone. I have told you, papa, the limits of my submission to your wishes. Now I will go, give Alice her bryonia, and then put on my bonnet, and walk with Justinian and make this call. I'll get it over at once.'

'Very well, my dear; now leave me to my sermon.'

When Jane Curgenven had made up her mind to do a thing that was disagreeable, she did it at once. Accordingly, after having administered the bryonia as a matter of conscience—not that Alice required it, but because she had said she would administer it—Jane Curgenven started with Justinian to call at the Manor.

She was by no means sure that the squiress would receive her, for she was aware that her behaviour to Theresa on the Sunday had been discourteous if not insolent. Jane had satisfied her own conscience as to her conduct. 'I am not a hypocrite. What I feel I express. If that person resents my treatment of her—it makes no difference to me—I have done what I undertook. If she receives me and is civil, it will be very clear that she has a guilty conscience, knows that I was in the right, and cringes to me to obtain my silence.'

But Jane did not find Theresa at home. The footman in-

formed her that Mr. and Mrs. Curgenven had just left the house in the dog-cart for Liskeard. This was a relief to her mind. She left her card and departed.

Percival had driven his wife into Liskeard to have a look at the Pill-box, and decide what was to be done with its furniture. The lease would soon be up, and he was undecided whether to have the contents sold, or whether to remove them to Curgenven, or, again, whether he would sell part and retain a moiety of the articles. A groom sat behind in the dog-cart, so that Theresa and her husband could not converse with freedom during the drive. Moreover, on reaching the Pill-box, Bathsheba, who had returned to it, not having proved a success as housekeeper over a large establishment, had much to say, grievances to complain of, and inquiries to make relative to her favourite, Master Justinian.

After a while Percival was able to send the old woman about some commission in the town, and then he threw himself into his old smoking arm-chair, drew Theresa to him, put his arm about her, and looked round.

'I say, T., I had no conception it was so dirty and small. Do look at the smoked ceiling—see how shabby the paper is. Fancy enduring for so long a mangy red-flock paper! It is stuffy—one can hardly breathe here.'

'Poor old house! You were happy here—you must love it.'

'I don't see that. I was happy in spite of it. Why, T., think of the study at home, and then look at this.' Curgenven was home to him now.

'Upon my word, T., it is a wonder to me how men can consent to live in such tight quarters. It is not wholesome. There should be a law against it. The State takes care that in school-rooms there be sufficient cubic feet of air. It should forbid the construction of a house in which there is not breathing-space.'

'You have been in worse places than the Pill-box.'

'I know I have. I look back with horror on existence as it was then, just as does a butterfly, I suppose, on its chrysalis or caterpillar state.'

'But, Percival, suppose, like Sly, you were to wake up and find it all a dream, and you were back in the Pill-box, after a brief period of lordship?'

'Like Sly, I'd say: "Come, madam wife, sit by my side, and let the world slip; we shall ne'er be younger."'

'What, Percival, you would be content?'

'Not I—my only consolation would be that I should take you with me, heart's delight.'

Theresa put her arm about his neck.

'You would reconcile yourself to it?' she said.

'Never. Indeed, I am not sure but that, having you here,

and not being able to give you the comforts and pleasures you deserve, I would feel it as an aggravation of the ill.'

'And yet, there is something to be said on the other side. It is no secret that the society of Philistia does not choose to accept me, and that this is an awkwardness and irritation to you. It places you in difficulties.'

'My own T., what care I for the society of Philistia? They showed me the cold shoulder when I lived in the Pill-box. Now good folk would like to be civil, but you puzzle them, because they think you have been an actress. Moreover, Jane has been telling tales, or hinting evil, after the fashion of the professionally pious. The Philistines are slow and timorous in the extreme, each afraid of the other. Do not concern yourself about them. I did not when in this house. I saw their carriages, their broughams and victorias and landaus pass, and never did one stop at this door. I got along without them, and I shall get along without them very comfortably till it pleases them to come round in their sluggish way. When they do, I accept it, not for my sake, but for yours. But as for the society of Philistia, I care for it not a snap. Bless you, T., dearest, we who have knocked about the world, and have brains of quicksilver, cannot find much pleasure in association with brains of white lead and linseed oil kneaded into a putty.'

'But, Percival, suppose that there had been some mistake about the property, and that a will were found.'

'Oh, you have had that nonsense propounded before you. Physic told me something of the sort. I do not believe for a moment that such a will exists. If it exists, why has it not been produced? The only person who would be interested in concealing or destroying such a will would be myself, and, by George! I'm not the man to do such a thing as that.'

'And if you found the will you would give it up?'

'I would—and then shoot myself.'

'And I——'

'My dearest T., I know as well as you that I should be merely an incumbrance to you. I cannot earn my livelihood. I tried as a surgeon, and after killing one or two of my patients, took to art, and never sold a picture. I had not learned perspective nor how to mix my colours. I went sheep-farming in the Rockies, and lost my sheep. I was taken in—bought a farm where there could be no provision for the sheep in the winter. They starved—I was ruined. I tried a clerkship, but I never in my life could do compound addition. I was kicked out. By Moses! T., I have tried being everything but being a waiter, and have made a botch of everything. The long and the short of it is, I'm an ass. Dear old Lambert took me up and cared for me. But I am incapable now as I

was before of earning enough to find me in bread-and-butter. I have the best will, but I can't do it. I know what the end would be; you would take in needlework and wear these dear fingers to the bone to maintain me. Rather than that, I'd blow my brains out. I'd do the honest and right thing, if that will turned up, and then I'd make my *congé* to a world in which I don't know how to live except as a gentleman who has inherited a fortune which he is incapable of acquiring for himself. But there, away with these thoughts. Thank heaven !—I do it heartily—there is and can be no such will. Physic has tried to scare me, and some one—Jane, I suppose—has been playing on your fears. I snap my fingers under the nose of the bogie. There is no such will.'

CHAPTER III.

AGAIN: INVENI PORTUM.

Mr. Curgenven and Justinian went for a couple of nights to the house of Sir Sampson Tregontick for a shooting party. Justinian was a keen sportsman and a good shot; Percival was a sportsman by fits and starts, and not a successful one when he had the fit on him.

Theresa was not sorry that they were away; she had to form a decision as to her course with Physic, and then take it. She desired to be alone to consider what she should do. There was no one whom she could consult. She had no friend save her husband, and she was precluded from laying the matter before him. Bitterly, but with a sense of its ineffectuality, did she reproach herself for having placed in the agent's hand the weapon with which he now threatened her. If she had withheld the document, looked at it before it left her possession, this condition of affairs would not have existed.

She locked herself into her boudoir and opened the jewel-case. She drew from it the same jewels she had exhibited to Esther, and sat looking at them and musing. They—the finest of them, at all events—were heirlooms. Jane Curgenven had had them in her possession, but had conscientiously relinquished them. Theresa knew how much it must have cost Jane to resign these to herself; but Jane had done it, actuated by her strict sense of justice, with scrupulous rectitude, not retaining a single ring or brooch which she could not say had been a present to herself. And now Theresa was asked to alienate from the family these ornaments that had decorated the Curgenven ladies for several generations. Could she do it? She weighed the reasons urging to compliance with Physic's demand. They were cogent. If this will could be got from him and destroyed, then the Curgenven family would be delivered from the scandal of the revelation of the relation in which Captain Lambert had stood to Jane Pamphlet. This was the more important, as Theresa saw there was a growing inclination towards each other between the young people. A marriage between Justinian and Alice would heal everything, if only the secret of the invalidity of the marriage of Alice's mother could be kept from the world. The cousins were much together now, and their affection for each other was ripening. Were Percival with herself and Justinian banished from

Curgenven, then in all probability this nascent passion would be nipped in the bud. Percival would leave England and take his son with him. Jane Curgenven would do all that lay in her power to stop the intimacy.

For this reason it seemed worth while, at the cost of the jewellery, to secure the will. But, on the other hand, Theresa shrank from the consequences to herself. The day might come when the heirloom would be required of her; the jewels might be looked for after her death, and she would be accused of having misappropriated them. If they were asked for in her lifetime, she would not be able to give her reasons for having disposed of them, and it might reawaken suspicion in her husband, and turn away his heart from her. In future generations she would be spoken of as the dishonest woman who had fraudulently got rid of this treasure of the family. She could conceive in what terms Jane would refer to her, when Alice was squiress of Curgenven, and the family jewellery was not forthcoming wherewith to array her. Jane trampled on her in life and would trample on her when dead. The loss of the necklaces, and rings, and brooches would be used as corroborative proof against her character. Yet she, Theresa, was called on to make the sacrifice, not only to preserve her own fortune, but also Jane's good name. To save Jane's good name she must steep her own in ignominy!

Theresa put up the jewels, unlocked her door, and went out to walk in the garden. Her responsibility overwhelmed her, and her blood was in a fever, her brain in a whirl. At one moment she thought she would let Physic do his worst. At the next she shrank from the prospect of being cast on the world again, and was prepared to make any sacrifice to escape that. At one moment it seemed to her right to allow Captain Lambert's last wishes to take effect, at whatever cost to the family; and then she doubted whether it was his last wish to brand his child with bastardy. Surely, she said, he drew up that will on the supposition that I, on reappearing, would assert my right to be his wife or widow, claim the name, and put in some plea for sustentation from the property. I have not done any of this. I have been willing to let my rights be covered over; and to save his memory, to spare the feelings of his wife, to prevent a slur falling on his child, I have consented to let the past be as a thing that had not been. Under these circumstances the aspect of the case is altered. Had he thought I would do this, he would never have made that will. I am fulfilling his best wishes in doing what I can at whatever cost to recover and destroy it.

She longed, she craved for advice, for some one to whom to confide her difficulties, and who, with clear sight into the ways of right and wrong, might lead her to do what was not

only expedient for all concerned, but what was the course morally justifiable.

As if in answer to this cry out of her heart, the rector appeared before her.

'Oh, Mr. Pamphlet!' She ran to him with a flutter at her heart, a crimson spot in each cheek, and with both hands extended. 'Oh! Mr. Pamphlet, do help me! I want advice in great difficulty. Do come with me into the walled garden, and let me tell you all.'

'Most assuredly,' answered the rector blandly. 'Providence and the bishop have placed me here as pastor of souls, to guide the doubtful, strengthen the weak, raise the fallen, and clear the clouds from before all darkened eyes, to the best of my poor ability.'

'That is exactly what I want—what I want above everything in the world,' gasped Theresa. 'Oh, how kind, how good of you!'

'Not at all; it is my duty, by virtue of my office and commission.'

She threw open the garden gate, and both entered. There was a long wall against which old figs grew, and she turned to that. No gardeners were about. In the fig walk they could be alone, unobserved and not overheard. They paced together the whole length of the walk before she spoke; they turned

at the end, by the tool-house, and then he said encouragingly, 'Now—what is it?'

'Mr. Pamphlet, my poor husband, in his will——'

'Good gracious! He has gone out rabbit-shooting—there has not occurred an accident?'

'No. I mean Captain Lambert.'

'Oh!'

'He made a will by which he provided for your daughter under her maiden name, and for his child by her.'

'Oh!' Mr. Pamphlet's face grew long and blank.

'This is in existence, but has not been produced. We are threatened with its production.'

'Merciful powers! If this get about—and any one could go to Somerset House and see the will for a shilling—then my chances of elevation to a bish—I mean my ministerial efficacy in the parish would be crippled!'

'The will leaves everything to your daughter and grandchild.'

'Yes—but—I would rather sacrifice everything than have this come out.'

'Then what do you think should be done?'

'*I*—*I* think—*I*——'

'There has been an offer made to compromise the matter. That is to say, the will will be delivered into my hands on condition that I surrender the family jewels.'

'What, to suppress—tear up the will! But that is a felony. Why did you mention this to me?'

The rector's face became pink, showing doubly so by contrast with his white whiskers.

'Am I justified in accepting this offer?'

'Oh, don't ask me. For Heaven's sake, consult any one—Percival, Physic—any one but me. I don't want to be mixed up in this matter at all.'

'I cannot speak of it to my husband, for you know his direct manner; he would say, "Prove the will," without considering results, how they affected himself or any one else. I cannot consult Mr. Physic for other reasons. I have no one to confer with but yourself in this matter—in this difficulty.'

'Oh! good gracious! I want to hear no more about it. It might get into the papers. I had better know nothing; then, should there be any trouble, I could safely protest my ignorance.'

'But, Mr. Pamphlet! it affects your interests, as you yourself admitted.'

'Ye—s.' He dropped the umbrella he was carrying from his shaking hand, and when he stooped to pick it up, his hat fell on the path from his shaking head.

'I have to decide, and decide at once, whether to sacrifice the jewels or not.'

'But the jewels are an heirloom, are most valuable. You have really no right—oh, why did you consult me about this? I am involved in a matter out of which I wish to keep clear.'

'It is for your own sake and your daughter's that I consult you.'

I see—I see—but, goodness! I do not know what to say.'

'Would you advise me to allow of the production of the will?'

'That would be fatal to my interests. It would blast my family with eternal disgrace.'

'Then shall I surrender the jewels?'

'That would be robbery of the family. You have no right to dispose of them.'

'Then what am I to do?'

'Is there no other way? can you not frighten—threaten the person, whoever he be, that has this will?'

'How threaten—frighten?'

'He is committing felony in retaining it.'

'That would but force him to produce it.'

'I see. My head is turning. Can't you say you have no right to dispose of the jewels?'

'He knows that as well as I.'

'Then—I really do not know what to say. I had best advise nothing, and I must adapt myself to whatever happens as best I can.'

'Then, Mr. Pamphlet, I want guidance in my doubt, and you cannot give it me?'

'I don't want to compromise myself.'

'And you cannot advise?'

'No—I'd rather not. It might get into the papers.'

'Nor clear the clouds from my darkened eyes?'

'Indeed, no—oh dear, no!' After a long pause and deep meditation, and much combing of his white whiskers with the disengaged fingers, Mr. Pamphlet said, 'And yet I can give you my advice. I was wrong in saying I could not—my matured and weighty advice in this matter——'

'And that is——?'

'To form your own opinion on it, and having formed, to follow it.'

They left the garden, and Theresa walked with the rector through the churchyard to the garden gate of the parsonage. He avoided all further reference to the subject of consultation, and spoke of the weather, the rabbit-shooting, the schools, and parochial matters. The night had begun to close in. It was not dark, but gloomy, a dull leaden shadow hung over the landscape, and the distance was obscure. Theresa turned at

the gate, after having with a heavy heart bidden the rector farewell.

'Shall I go back with you to the house?' he asked hesitatingly; 'night is falling rapidly.'

'No, thank you, I know my way; the white space of the path is visible enough.'

'And you are not afraid to go through the churchyard alone?'

'Why should I? I have not annoyed the dead.'

'There are two or three paths; mind not to take that to the left; it leads to the place where the heating apparatus is, and there are steps to it.'

'You need not fear.'

Then Theresa set off at a quick pace to cross the graveyard. The church rose as a huge black patch against the sky before her.

The rector also turned to walk home, but changed his mind, and said to himself, 'I will wait till she is through.'

Theresa did not know this. She stepped on, more troubled in mind than before. She had sought light, and been given none. The day was appointed on which she was to meet Physic at Tolmenna, and by then the decision must be made one way or other.

As she came near the flat tombstone on which she had

reposed on Sunday, she was startled to see in the darkness a figure as of a man seated where she had been, and he seemed to be doing what she had done, tracing the letters on the stone with his finger. Her heart stood still, her feet were arrested. Then, as he traced, she saw each letter shine phosphorescent in the dark:—

Inveni portum; spes et Fortuna valete.

She uttered an exclamation of terror.

He turned his face, a lambent light played over it, and she knew her first husband.

With a cry she sank to the ground and lost consciousness.

CHAPTER IV.

A THIRD ALTERNATIVE.

Theresa did not return to full consciousness at once. There came to her glimpses of light and bursts of sound, episodes of wakefulness to movement, and to a sight of drawn curtains and a sound of whispers, and then tracts of insensibility.

When she did awake to full possession of her faculties, she found herself in bed in her own room, and she heard the voices of her husband and of the doctor. Both had been summoned.

The first sentence she heard and understood was spoken by the medical attendant. He said: 'She must be kept perfectly quiet, and not be bothered about the jam. Her heart is affected.'

Theresa raised herself on her elbow, and said: 'Yes, I knew that—since my last illness.'

'It was the jam—and very provoking,' exclaimed the surgeon.

But Percival ran to the bedside and took her hand between his and said: 'You are better, T.; nearly right again! That is capital!'

'What has happened?' she asked.

'My dearest T., you have given us such a fright?'

'And I——' she mused. 'Yes, I have had a fright too.'

'It was the rats,' threw in the surgeon. ''Twas vexing, I allow, and sixteen pots of jam. All the brandy cherries, also.'

'You have had a succession of fainting fits. You fell back into one as soon as brought round. We were afraid you would slip away altogether, between our fingers, in one of them. Then, T., what should I have done?'

She looked affectionately in his face, and he stooped and kissed her.

'I had a fright; I suppose that was it,' said Theresa meditatively. 'Yes, I was coming through the churchyard——' Then she interrupted herself, turned to the doctor, and asked, 'May I get up?'

'Not to-night. Perhaps to-morrow. But, mind this; don't you go exciting yourself over pots of jam and brandy cherries any more.'

'Pots of jam?'

'Ah, yes! I know all about it. I made inquiries, and found that the rats had been at the store closet, and had eaten the parchment off sixteen pots, so that the fruit was mildewed, and had in the same way uncovered the brandy cherries, put their tails in, sucked them, and absorbed all the juice. It was very vexing, but you must not fret over these matters. You will have to buy, that is all. Don't worry yourself any more. Leave all that to the housekeeper, and keep your heart emotionless. It must be saved all kind of agitation.'

'I had forgotten about the jams.'

'Oh, no, that was it! The housekeeper told me how it disturbed you. You've been brooding over it—that is what has done it. Now, dear lady, be brave, be heroic; banish the jams and the brandy cherries from your thoughts, and set yourself to get well. That is my best advice. The heart is a delicate and capricious instrument, like a chronometer. It must not be treated jerkily, but gingerly. You understand?'

When the doctor was gone, Theresa made Percival take a chair by her bedside, and said: 'Now, tell me all about it.'

'The old boy found you.'

'Who is he?'

'I mean Mr. Pamphlet. He came to the house to say that he had found you in the churchyard in a fainting fit.'

'I dare say. I had been talking to him in the walled garden, and I accompanied him through the yard to his wicket-gate. Then I turned.' She pressed Percival's hand with a nervous spasm, and said: 'I saw Lambert there—I mean in the graveyard.'

'Fudge!'

'I did. He was sitting on a flat stone, and was writing on it in Latin.'

'Now, T., that is clearly impossible. Dear old Lambert had no more knowledge of Latin than

Amo amas,
I loved a lass!

and, unfortunately for him, he loved two, and was not off with the old before he was on with the new. That's the length of his Latin. You won't make me believe he's been to a grammar school in kingdom come, and has become so ready with his classics that he can scribble in the Latin tongue.'

'I do not quite mean that, Percy. I had seen this tombstone on Sunday. The lines on it are—

"Inveni portum; spes et Fortuna valete;
Nil mihi vobiscum: ludite nunc alios."'

'They are beyond me.'

'I am no scholar, but I think I know the sense. It is this: I have found harbour. Hope and Good Fortune, farewell. I have nothing more to do with you. Go now, make sport of others.'

'I don't like the sentiment at all,' said Percival; 'but I can't say that it did not apply to poor old Lambert. However, the whole thing is nonsense and fiddlesticks.'

'I saw him. He drew his finger along the letters, and then they became luminous. When I uttered an exclamation, he turned his face round to me.'

'My dear T.! the whole is a delusion. You have been over-exciting yourself—not about the jam and cherries in brandy, as the doctor thinks, but about other things. There has been Physic, or some one, frightening you concerning a will of Lambert's. I know there has. You spoke to me about it. Very well; the point is established. You have been fretting over Lambert. Very natural that, when a little out of health, you should fancy you saw him. Then you say you read that inscription on the tombstone last Sunday. You had been thinking of that, and you came to associate Lambert with the words. So, when your heated imagination conjured him up, it also made him scribble those lines. I don't know that I ever came across a ghost story so simple of

explanation. Send the thoughts of the poor old fellow back into the grave to sleep with him, and bother the Latin. It is not a fit inscription over any Christian. And, to please the doctor, don't think of the jam and brandy cherries. So you will be all right in a day or two.'

'I shall not be all right till the battle is over.'

'What battle?'

'The battle of life.'

'You have no cause to fight it.'

'Not, perhaps, the same battle as of old. But I cannot rest—I will not say on my laurels, for I have won none, but on a bed of poppies.'

'What have you to disturb you now?'

'Formerly, in that Bohemia in which we had to live—though neither of us belonged to it—we had a struggle for existence. I had to earn my daily bread, to strive under a thousand adverse circumstances, and to maintain my integrity through all—not an easy matter in Bohemia. The atmosphere is enervating there to the moral sense, though stimulating to the mental powers. However, I held my own; but it was a hard fight, and at last I broke down. My heart gave way, and I was forbidden to undertake any more professional work in concerts. Then I came very near to starvation. You know the rest. Your dear hand helped me.'

She looked fondly in Percival's face, and put up her lips to kiss him.

'You helped me. You placed me where I am. I am in a new sphere.'

'I see—you worry now because you have Jane and the world of Common Place to fight. The truly pious and infinitely narrow don't know what to make of you. Leave Jane alone, and concern yourself no more about her. It is a leaden weight crushing your heart. Shake it off.'

'It is not that. I am making no fight for position, or for recognition in my position. I am content with the place, your love, and Justinian's regard. I have had other troubles.'

'Oh, that affair about the three hundred pounds! Indigent relatives. Confound them! Now, take my advice, T. It is that I gave you when they began to worry you. Refer them all to Physic, or to me; we will settle them between us. Do not allow them to tease you any longer. Now that your health suffers, it won't do. I shall be angry, and send the police after them.'

'It was not altogether that——'

'Then what was it?'

She remained silent. She could not tell him.

'Now, look here, dearest T.,' said Percival. 'If you have

any bother, put it into Physic's hands. He is paid to take this sort of thing off our shoulders, and he can manage it much better than we can. It is his business, and it don't worry him. Indeed, he rather likes it. However, let all these matters be put aside now. You must on no account excite yourself. Let us change the topic. What will amuse you? What do you say to letting me see the Curgenven jewellery? I never have seen it. Come, let me have the key, and I will bring the case here. It will divert your thoughts, and will give me a pleasure.'

'Oh, Percy, please not!'

'Yes—your mind must be directed into another channel. Women love jewellery. Where is the key?'

She gave him what he asked for, and in a few minutes he brought the case to her room. Then Percival moved the lamp near to the bed, and lighted all the candles in the room. 'I must see the diamonds sparkle,' he said.

He unlocked the case and produced each article in the order in which it lay in the velvet-lined trays.

'I have a list of them all and their estimated values,' said Percival. 'That was all taken after Lambert's death, but there is a list that Jane gave me as well. And I see there is one in the box. It is as well to have several lists in case of accident or robbery.'

Percival continued for some time trifling with and admiring the jewels, under the impression that he was giving pleasure to his wife, or at all events diverting her thoughts from the topics that had occupied them.

'T., my love, next year Justinian is of age, and we will give a great ball then. You shall wear the diamond necklace Queen Anne gave to Lady Margaret Curgenven, and the tiara also. It will be a pleasure to see you in them, and I'll swear finer diamonds are not to be seen in Cornwall. I said something to-day about a ball, and you should have seen how Lady Tregontick and the girls jumped. She at once told me that she was coming to call on you. And you may be quite certain that every mother with a marriageable daughter will put her scruples in her pocket and come and see you—for Justinian's sake. I do not think there are many who would not give their ears to see a daughter married to the heir of Curgenven. The women have been hanging back because Jane has done mischief. But Jane does not direct their consciences; self-interest does that.'

He looked round at his wife. Her eyes were closed.

'You are tired,' he said; 'I am afraid I have talked too much. I will put the jewels away where you keep them, and bring back the key. The place is safe, unless a burglar got into your room.'

Percival kissed Theresa and left. Her hands were folded under the bedclothes over her heart.

What was to be done? After what Percival had said, it was not possible for her to dispose of the jewels. Next year she would be required to wear them—at the coming of age of Justinian. She was woman enough to feel satisfaction at the thought that in spite of Jane Curgenven she would be recognized by the county. What Percival had said was true. The squirearchy, or rather the female adherents of the squires, would swallow their prejudices, tread down their doubts, and receive her among themselves, if not cordially, at all events formally, for the sake of a ball and of the chance of catching Justinian. Jane would, of course, not come to the ball, but would hear the carriages drive past the rectory on the way to the Hall, carriage succeeding carriage, and be taught thereby that she was defeated—the scorned woman was Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven. No one loves to be trampled on. Theresa cared for no better revenge than this, though she had in her power the means of executing a terrible one on her rival. She might bow herself and bring down the house, but, like Samson, to her own destruction; and it would be poor satisfaction to be buried under the same ruins with Jane Curgenven.

The morrow was the day of decision.

If Theresa remained at home, the affairs of the Curgenven

family would settle themselves. The wheel would turn, and the revolution would be complete. She, and Percival, and Justinian would be cast on the world, and Jane, with a blasted name and her child branded as a bastard, would occupy Curgenven without being qualified to bear the name of Curgenven.

What could she do? She could not endure this prospect. Wearied to death, worn out with struggle, her health failing, her spirits broken, she was unequal to the task of recommencing life in poverty. She thought of the drudgery of existence when every shilling has to be considered. The strain to make both ends of a very short purse meet—she was unequal to it. Twenty years ago she would cheerily have faced poverty. It was now twenty years too late.

But how avert the danger?

The jewels she could not surrender. Even if she suffered them to be held in pawn, could she be sure of raising the money to redeem them when needed? Could she be sure that Percival would not ask to see them when they were out of the house? Could she be sure that Physic would not make away with them? perhaps replace the finest diamonds with imitation stones which she could not detect. Was there no alternative, no third course possible? Theresa thought of the words on the tombstone, and felt a longing for rest, even if it could be

in the harbour of the grave only. For herself it would have been well had she not recovered from the swoon into which she had fallen. But she loved Percival. She loved him with all her heart. He was the one object to which she clung She clung, knowing his infirmity, but forgiving that for the sake of the great good there was in him. For his sake she would live—live to deliver him, if possible, from the danger menacing him.

Would Physic use the will as he threatened? Might she not trust that he would see that his own interests lay in keeping it in his desk? But there would be no rest from his exactions, no relief from annoyance so long as Physic retained the document. Theresa again asked herself, Was there no third course open to her? And suddenly, with a scorching flash like a lightning-stroke athwart her brain, came the words of the rector. There was a third course. She might threaten him, and wring the will from him through playing on his fears.

CHAPTER V.

A MEETING.

Ting ! Ting ! Ting !

The clock on the stairs struck three. Three in the afternoon. And then the chimes in it began :

> There is nae luck about the house,
> There is nae luck ava'.

The clock had been an acquisition of Captain Curgenven, a lover of mechanism.

Theresa started and shivered.

She was in her boudoir, seated by a small fire, in a dream. At her entreaty Percival had gone back to the Tregonticks' along with Justinian for the rabbit-shooting. He was reluctant to leave her, but she had insisted. She assured him that it would worry her to think he was detained from his sports, that her mind would be more easy if he went, that she was much better after a night's rest. Percival, always

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disposed to be sanguine, acquiesced at once in the notion that she was better. He was confident that in a day or two she would be herself again. He held that the doctor had exaggerated her condition. Doctors always do such things so as to enhance their merits if they cure the malady.

But Percival was less willing to accept his dismissal. Notwithstanding his confidence, there lurked a doubt at the bottom of his heart.

'Dear old T.,' said he, 'I can't go and amuse myself when you are ill, and moping in your sick-room. 'Pon my life, I shan't enjoy it, I shall be thinking about you.'

Nevertheless she persuaded him to go; she wished it, and her will was the strongest of the two. He promised to be home for dinner, and Theresa undertook to come down to dinner at half-past seven.

He had been away since eleven, and had lunched at the house of the Tregonticks.

As the afternoon crept on, so did Theresa's uneasiness. At four o'clock Physic would be at Tolmenna with the original will, and if it was to be secured, it must be secured then by her. The strokes of the clock on the stairs announcing three came on her like the shock of an earthquake. The decisive moment had arrived when she must go. It mattered not that she was unfit to go—go she must. An

interview was before her certain profoundly to agitate her, at a time when she was warned to avoid all agitation. Nevertheless she must run the risk.

She opened the door and stole lightly down the great staircase, walking on the deep pile carpet, and her tread awaking no sound. No one was in the hall.

She had thrown a kerchief over her head, and drawing this closely round her, she went out on the terrace. There was no one about there, and she went to the bungalow without encountering any one, or observing any one, either in the grounds or at a window of the house, the fact being that an Italian boy with a barrel-organ and a monkey in an evening dress suit and white tie was at the back door, and servants, gardeners, and grooms had rushed into the kitchen yard to observe the antics of the creature. Theresa could hear the strains of the instrument, and now and then a squeal from a servant-maid, as the monkey ran to her and pulled her apron.

She entered the bungalow and pushed into the smoking-room, where she hastily took down one of the pistols hung on the rack against the wall, concealed it, and left the bungalow in the direction of the moor. Her heart was beating fast. The pulses bounded in her throat, and she gasped for breath. But no sooner was she outside the park walls and on the open common than her courage returned,

and her heart beat more evenly. She looked round. What a wonderful country that was! In our great cities the mansion of a millionaire and the house crowded with squalid and starving wretches are within a stone's throw. Here was wild and barren country untouched as in the times when the first savage inhabitants of Britain roved there, and behind the paling—divided by that only—the richest park land, growing cedars and oaks and chestnuts of centuries, on land cultivated through ages, and become docile to the hand of the landscape gardener of the nineteenth century. A thousand years—nay, two thousand intervened between this side and that of the park wicket. Within the gate you and the scenery belonged to the present epoch, outside it—in your modern costume and with your modern ideas—you are an anachronism.

But that was not all. A step from among the trees on to the moor was a step from one atmosphere into another; from the warm, sleepy, soft air of the south into the bracing, stimulating cold air of the north; it was a stride from one latitude to another. Nor was that all. It was a passage from one flora to another; from garden flowers of flaming hue, from spreading forest trees, to pale heather and bog asphodel, to grey moss and lichen soot-black or snow-white, and to no sign of tree other than a stunted thorn.

The afternoon was windy; clouds, white, piled up in masses, sailed as icebergs in the cold dark-blue sky, and cast indigo shadows over the moorland. Between the cloud masses the sun fell over stretches of barren waste, lighting it a pale sulphurous yellow. There had been rain. Some of the heavy clouds had burst and poured forth a deluge. Even now to the west all was a blur of blue grey cut by the half arch of a rainbow.

It seemed to Theresa, as she walked on the springy turf, that her sickness had passed away, that with the fresh moor air she inhaled new strength. Discouragement was gone, she was sanguine of success. Physic was a coward. She had but to frighten him, and he would give way. The jewel-case she had with her, under her cloak and left arm. It was locked, and she had left the key at home in her desk.

The lapwings were wheeling and screaming, and now and then came the pipe of the plover. A ring-ousel started up as Theresa approached some old streaming works, flew a little way, circled, uttered a plaintive remonstrance, rose, flew a little further, again remonstrated, and continued the same course for some distance, then gave it up and disappeared.

Theresa's way led past the Hurlers, rings of upright stones planted in a prehistoric period for an unknown purpose. Three of these circles remain; a line of stones has been

destroyed that at one time stretched across the moor to it, only two of these having been spared, standing about five and a half feet above the ground. The story goes that one Sunday the men of three parishes met on the moor to hurl a silver ball, and see which parish sent forth the man who was the best hurler. But as an interlude they began to throw stones, and they threw the granite slabs to the top of the nearest hill, one on top of the other, which stand to this day, and now constitute the Cheeswring. Then the men of two of the parishes, Linkinghorne and Southill were faint, and said they would throw no more till they had drunk ale. So they sent off two of their party to run for jars of beer. Then the wrath of Heaven was kindled against the Sabbath-breakers, and all were turned into stone, and at a distance from the three circles are to be seen the two messengers petrified in the act of running.[1] In the flying lights and shadows there was something startling in the appearance of these clusters of standing stones about the height of a man, some black with lichen, others white with spar, now dark against a background of moor that lay in sunshine, themselves overshadowed by a sailing cloud. Then the condition was reversed, all the waste behind steeped in purple, these stones

[1] So the story as told the author near the spot.

gleaming out like ghosts in a dance; and in the rapidly shifting light and shades they seemed endowed with motion, to be tossing, and lightly careering in circle, whilst the two outrunners in stooping position actually appeared to advance in their race for ale. No wonder that the place is avoided at night as 'whisht,' when even by day it has such an unearthly aspect.

But Theresa had no thoughts to bestow on bird or stone; she hugged the precious case to her side, and with her right hand felt the pistol that she had passed through the leather girdle round her waist.

She could not stand still without feeling the earth heave and lurch under her feet, and her head spin. But whilst walking she was unconscious of her weakness; she was animated by the hope to have done for ever with the annoyance caused by Physic. She had resolved, as soon as she had got the will from him, that she would persuade Percival to dismiss the man from his service. One so unscrupulous in the matter of the will would be unscrupulous in other matters.

Theresa had hardly reached Tolmenna before Physic arrived, riding upon a grey cob. He wore tight breeches and boots. In his hand was a crop. He had on a long great-coat.

'How do, ma'am?' said he, with insolently familiar nod as he trotted past. 'I'll hitch up and be at your service directly.' Then changing his mind he drew rein. 'I say—I heard a rumour that your ladyship was ill, so I e'en rode to Curgenven to inquire. They told me you were better, but not fit to come down-stairs. On my word, I didn't expect to see you here, after that. I came on to have a look at my bit of property, where I'm going to open a mine.' He turned his keen eyes round, raised his voice, and shouted, 'Hallo there! What, you gal! what are you doing on my lands? I'll have you up for trespass.' This to Esther, whom his sharp eye had detected.

He was off his cob in a minute. 'Look here, gal,' said he, 'you take the bridle and lead my grey up and down, and I'll give you a fourpenny-bit, which is more money than you have earned honestly so far, and having got will know how to spend.'

He threw the rein to Esther, who came forward sullenly and doubtfully, and seemed inclined to refuse. When, however, she saw that Physic wished to speak to Mrs. Curgenven, she took the rein with an impatient jerk of the hand and a toss of her head.

'Now look here, young savage,' said Physic, 'I've a word or two with this lady here that ain't for your ears. It's about

the mine, it is, I'm going to open here—wheal[1] something or other. I'll call it after her, whatever her Christian name is, with her good permission, and that's what I'll ask her, so sheer off to leeward.'

Esther looked at Theresa with inquiry, and when she saw that it was the lady's desire that she should comply with the orders given, she led the horse away in the direction of the Hurlers, and a mass of granite fragments heaped into a cairn hid her from the agent and Theresa.

'So then,' said Physic, 'you've come notwithstanding sickness, or was that put on, eh? You don't relish the prospect of turning out into the cold. I would not were I in the squire's place or yours. By George! it makes me laugh to think how cleverly you played your little game. I confess I was taken aback, and could not understand it when you gave me the sack. "Why!" said I to myself, "confound the woman, is she demented? Here is she without a penny to bless herself with, and when she gets an offer from me—an offer at which ten thousand girls would jump—she refuses me." I couldn't make out the sense of it. I knew you were clever. I didn't know how clever. I allow you, I was sore when I heard that Mr. Percival had succeeded in securing you, or rather that you had succeeded in securing him. But I laughed. It was darned

[1] Wheal (huel) is Cornish for mine.

clever, and it explained the puzzle. However, you don't escape scot free. You'll have to pay me for the honour and enjoyment of being squiress of Curgenven. So now—which is it to be—a thousand-pound cheque or the jewel-box?'

'Have you brought the will?'

'Rather think I have.'

'Not a copy? The original?'

'Do you doubt me? Fair dealing is my word.'

'Mr. Physic,' said Theresa, 'I have been ill, and ordered by the doctor not to be excited, or to be troubled about any matter, as my heart is affected. I have come here this evening at great risk to myself, and I ask you, under the circumstances, to give me a little longer time in which to consider what you have said, and the alternatives set before me.'

'Not another day, not another hour! Very sorry, 'pon my soul I am, that you've been ill. I can see it in your handsome face that you ain't up to mark. But, bless you! it's like having a tooth drawn, the worst is the making up your mind to it. It's the thinking over them beautiful diamonds and emeralds as has upset you. Of course it is. A lady don't fancy parting with such things as those. It is like taking the blood out of her heart. I'm tremendously sorry you have been worrited over them jewels, but it comes in the course of business. It's a deal; you give me the jewels and I'll give

you the will. I reckon it's worth more to you to have the will than to have a few trays of gewgaws. Why—the will means a comfortable house, a fine estate, and a position as a county lady. You will have the means of buying other jewellery—any amount of sham; and who's to tell that it is sham? I know what you're afraid of—lest these should be asked after. Leave that to me. I'll get you shams as 'll pass very well. You haven't said a word to the squire, I suppose, about this affair?'

Theresa shook her head. She had drawn her long dark cloak about her, and wrapped it round her with her arms crossed under the cloak. Very white and deathlike her face appeared by contrast with the black cloth cloak. The cloak was one Percival had given her, a Belgian cloak, such as is worn by the women in the markets of Bruges and Ghent, with a silk-lined hood, and a brass clasp at the breast. She had tied a purple silk kerchief over her hair, knotted under her chin.

'You insist on the thing being settled at once?' she asked in a low tone, and slowly.

'Most assuredly. Look here. I'm going to work a company and have a mine here, and I need money to set the affair on wheels.'

'Let me look at the will.'

He put his hand into a pocket of his long great-coat, a pocket on the inside, and drew forth a packet.

'Here you are,' said he. 'And I pray you to observe that I have got capacious pockets. I came provided so that I could stow the jewel-case away in one of them.'

'Give me the will.'

'Thank you,' said Physic with a laugh. 'Give you the will, and away you would run fleet as a doe, thinking to make off with it, and without fulfilling your part of the bargain. How am I to know that you have brought the jewel-case with you?'

'Satisfy yourself with your own eyes.'

Theresa drew forth the case and held it before her.

'Very well,' said the agent. 'So far so good. Now, you put that in my hand, and I will put the document you so covet into yours. We'll deliver up simultaneously.'

Slapping his boot with his crop he turned and looked about him. Esther was not visible, but the cob was; she had thrown herself down on the granite cairn, and was allowing the cob to munch the grass as far as he could reach, restrained by her hand and the bridle, that she had unbuckled on one side of the bit.

'It's all right,' said Physic. He put the whip into his mouth, across, and held out the will with one hand whilst laying hold eagerly of the case with the other.

Theresa at once secured the will in her bosom.

'Wait, my beauty!' said the agent, removing the whip from his mouth, 'I've not done yet. Where is the key?'

'Here!' exclaimed Theresa, suddenly drawing the pistol, and presenting it at his head.

Physic sprang back.

'Now,' said Theresa, 'give me back the case immediately.'

'Oh, yes,' answered the agent, recovering himself. 'A pretty trick for a stage-player. But it won't do; you can't scare me. Why, bless you! you ain't got the pistol cocked, much less charged.'

Theresa at once drew back the cock.

'Give me up the jewel-case!'

Physic whirled his crop about to bring it down across her hand. 'You hit me once across the knuckles,' said Physic savagely; 'now I'll pay you with interest. By George! I'll give you a wale across them lily-whites!'

He swung the crop again, and set his teeth. In a moment, before the blow fell, there was an explosion.

Theresa saw the flash, felt the shock in her hand without understanding what had happened; saw Physic stagger, as though tipsy, and fall in a heap on the sward.

CHAPTER VI.

OFF.

Theresa stood like one of the Hurlers or Runners, motionless, petrified. She could not realize at once what had happened; she was not conscious of having drawn the trigger. Her finger had contracted instinctively before the fall of the whip. That the pistol was loaded had not entered her imagination. She had forgotten altogether that Esther had charged it, offered it to her, and when she had declined to experimentalize with it, had replaced it loaded on the rack a few days ago. She had thought to frighten Physic, certainly not to kill him. He lay motionless before her, with a bullet in his heart. Theresa's senses were sharpened to acuteness at that moment; she saw, and heard, and smelt with preternatural keenness—saw Physic on the ground, with two boot-soles turned towards her, and saw that the sole of one boot

had been patched, and that the patching nails were bright; she heard the cob whinny; and she smelt gunpowder. But she could not think; she could not put together the chain of events, and understand how this terrible accident had taken place. She was roused by the voice of Esther.

'Oh, jimmeny! You've done it!'

She tried to turn her head and to speak; she could do neither. Esther went to the fallen man, touched him, looked in his face, and came back to Theresa.

'He's dead, I reckon, dead as a want' (mole) 'on a linney' (cattle-shed) 'door. Whativer is to be done?'

Theresa was in no condition to speak.

'I say—now,' Esther looked at the dead man, then at the lady, ''tes a hanging matter, I reckon. Lord! I often said as I would like to do it, and do it I would: but now 'tes done, it's another matter altogether, and I never 'd ha' picked up courage to do it. But, Lor'! what is to be done now? It'll niver do for them to take you to prison and hang you—a lady, and so good. I'll tell 'ee what—I'll take it all on myself. Ees—I will for sure sartain, and let 'm try to catch me. They won't do it. There, lady! don't y' take on and be afraid. I'll pretend I did it; and if they do hang me, it's no great odds, I'm sure.'

Theresa did not stir, she remained stupefied with terror;

then Esther laid hold of her arm, shook her, and walked with her a few paces away from the corpse.

'Look y' here,' said Esther, 'what do y' mean now by holding thickey pistern? Why, them as seed y' wi' her sure enough would say you did it. Give her to me.'

She twisted the weapon out of the hand of Theresa, who now drew a long breath, and put up her hand to her brow. When her eyes no longer rested on the body with the upturned patched boot-soles, her spellbound condition began to yield.

'It couldn't be helped,' said Esther reassuringly. 'I reckon that when gran'mither cast the eye on him and ill-wished him, it were sure to come from one or other. He ought never to ha' turned us out o' Tolmenna. He brought it on his own head. What had he done to y' that you took the pistern to 'n? But never mind, you can tell me that another day. Now be peart' (smart), 'and get back to Curgenven, and leave the rest to me.'

Theresa was in that condition in which obedience to another's will was the only course she could take. She could neither think for herself, nor consider the consequences of what had taken place; she therefore drew her cloak about her with a cramp-like spasm, and walked in the direction indicated by Esther, at first slowly, hardly dragging one foot after the

other, then quicker, and finally almost at a run. As she placed distance between herself and the corpse, animation returned, her muscles became flexible, her pulses throbbed, and the terror, instead of striking her with paralysis, became a goad urging her to fly the spot. Panting, shuddering, bathed in perspiration, she passed through the park, re-entered the house, and regained her room unnoticed. When there she divested herself of kerchief and cloak, put them away, and then sank into her chair, covered her eyes, and burst into tears.

Wherever she went, whatever she undertook, she was led into disaster; she had, however, never previously been brought into such a situation as the present, that threatened not herself only, but the whole family into which she had been taken.

In the meanwhile Esther had stepped back to the body; she knelt beside it, and assured herself that life was extinct. Then she stood with folded arms, her feet in a heather bush, musing, and looking at the dead man. She had the pistol in her hand. She was not oppressed with any of the horror or fear that had taken hold of Theresa. In her rude mind she was not capable of realizing all that death was. The man who had sent her grandfather to prison, who had turned the old people and herself out of their house and had torn it down, was

lying dead before her, and he had been served as he deserved. He was now innocuous, and the main thought that occupied her mind was whether it would now be possible for her grandparents to return to Tolmenna and rebuild the ruins. She had hated the agent, and yet, as he lay before her dead, with his ugly face turned to the light, and the flying shadows and sun-gleams dancing over it, she was conscious of a sense of pity.

'Deary me, now!' said she. ''Tes curious. I couldn' kill the hoodwall, and I took aim at 'n. I reckon 'twere this very pistern; and sure then I said I'd never 'a missed had I fired at Physic. But I'm not so sartain neither now if he'd 'a stood facin' me as I'd 'a had the sperit to do it. Deary life, it's edication does it. There's me can't read vitty at all, and the lady there—as easy as anything. Her shot 'n—straight on end. It's edication does it.'

She stooped and looked at Physic once more, and now saw the jewel-case that had fallen from his hand in the convulsion of death.

She recognized this at once, and wondered how he had come by it. She took it up, and going to the ruins of the cottage secreted it in a place she well knew under the floor, where her grandfather had been accustomed to hide his money.

Then she walked away in the direction of cultivated land.

As she was descending from the moor into a lane she met Pike the horsebreaker, leading Physic's cob by the rein.

'I say, Esther Morideg! Have y' seen Mr. Physic anywheres? Here's his cob running loose. He passed my house not an hour ago, and said to my missus he were going to Tolmenna about his mine. I caught the cob running down the lane.'

'Physic is dead!' said Esther. 'I've shot 'n; and here's the pistern. Take it back to Curgenven.'

'You've shot him?'

'Aye, I reckon. Why did he turn gran'fer out o' the house? What else could he expect, and ill-wished too by gran'mother!'

'Physic dead!'

'Aye! and here be the pistern as have done it. I borrowed her t'other day I were i' the bungalow up to Curgenven, and I took away the pistern wi' me. I thought I'd punish that chap for turning us out o' our house, and tearing it abroad. I've done it, and there be the tool back. They'll be after me to put me i' the clink, I reckon, so I'm off.'

She gave him the pistol.

'No, thank you,' said he. 'They'll be having me pinned up if they find me wi' that. You come along of me to where

there's some one else, and tell the tale, and then it's right enough.'

'Very well.'

'Come along to the old turnpike house, my missus 'll hear what you have to say, and then you can leave the pistol there and welcome, but I wi'n't take it wi'out a witness, and risk the noose round my neck. He were an aggravating sort o' a chap, he were, and I don't blame you. He didn't treat your folks as 'a ought to 'a treated 'em, and this be the consekence. Well, it's a pity if they swing you, and a shame too. But I've gotten all I wanted from Physic, and so I don't bear him a grudge. If it 'd been your gran'fer as 'ad done it, I shouldn't ha' been surprised, but it's lively games for a giglot' (young girl).

As Pike walked alongside of Esther he turned his eyes out of their corners to observe her. She strode along the lane with light tread, upright as a wand, easy in every movement, her head erect, covered with its dense cloud of shining hair.

A sense of compunction came over him. This handsome girl—was he to be the means of bringing her to her death? He would not have liked to ride a well-formed colt so as to break its wind or throw it down and cut its knees, and he did not relish the thought of having a hand in the destruction of so splendid a girl.

'I say, Esther,' he began, 'I don't care to ha' naught to do wi't.'

'Wi' what, maister?'

'Why, sure enough, wi' your being hanged. I don't say but wi' the agravation, Physic desarved it all, and that I wouldn't 'a done the like myself in a like agravation, but I'm not over-pleased to put my fingers into the matter.'

'It won't hurt y'.'

'No—it won't hurt me. But I don't care to have to appear against you, maiden, and mebbe say what may cause you to swing. I shu'dn't be easy after.'

'You needn't be afeared, Turnipike, they'll niver catch me. How can they? There's nobody knows the moor as I do. Why, if I ran out over Trewortha Marsh, could they follow? I reckon if they tried they'd be stopped. Or Crowdy Marsh nother—that's every bit and crumb as bad. And the rocks and stones o' Brown Willy and Rough Tor. Be there not scores on scores o' hiding-places there?'

'That's well enough, but you can't live on air.'

'Who'd tell tales o' me? Never you fear. Folks wouldn't let me starve when they knowed I were in hiding. I tell y' nigh to Rough Tor is a fogou' (cave)——

'Nay, not a word; I don't want to hear nothing about hiding-places. I wish you'd go and tell your tale about

shooting thickey chap to some one else. I tell y' clean out, I won't know naught more about it, and here's good-bye according.'

He jumped on Physic's horse that he had been leading and galloped down the lane and out upon the road, where he dismounted and turned the cob adrift.

'I will go to Turnipike's missus for all that,' said Esther, and walked on. She had hardly reached the road before she met the rector, combing his whiskers, and blandly smiling at first one hedge and then the other, as though they were dissenters to be conciliated.

'Pars'n!' said Esther, striding up to him, 'can y' write now?'

'Write, my child, of course I can. Don't I write two sermons every week and three in Lent?'

'Will y' now come in wi' me to Betsy Pike's, and write out what I want to say?'

'Certainly, with the utmost alacrity. And what is it about?'

'About that ou'd Physic.'

'Physic! What about him?

'About the shutting of him.'

'Shutting—shutting, where has he been shut up?'

'He's a-shut through the heart, and dead as a want' (mole).

'Gracious me!'

The rector stood still, and his jaw dropped.

'I'd like y', pars'n, to take down all I've gotten to say about it. And there—there's the pistern as did it. Smell to it, her's got the smitch' (smell) 'o' powder about her still.'

'Merciful goodness!' Mr. Pamphlet remained motionless, gasping.

'And I want y' to put it all down on paper how it were a-done.'

'Shot—Mr. Physic shot! You wicked girl, you are making a joke—a miserable practical joke!'

'It's all right,' said Esther. 'Come wi' me if you doubt, and I'll show you where he lies at Tolmenna. What made he go for to drive gran'fer and us—me and my ou'd grammer out o' the house for, if he didn't expect a breakfast off lead? My grammer ill-wished him, and it's come to pass. Her said it would. Will y' now please come and put it all down in writing? And please tak' the pistern and give her to the perlice.'

'*I!*—I!—I!'

Mr. Pamphlet flushed the colour of a mulberry. 'I'll have nothing whatever to do with this. *I* mixed up in a police case like this! *I* have to appear in a court as witness, and

be cross-questioned; it might interfere with my prospects—I mean my ministerial efficacy. I'll have nothing to do with it. Don't touch me! Don't let me see that horrible pistol! Go away! go away! Gracious! go away! Don't come near me—don't stop me!' and the Revd. Mr. Rector walked, almost ran, to escape the girl.

Esther stood irresolute for a few moments, looking after him, when she heard a sharp peremptory voice demand, 'What is the matter?'

She turned and saw Jane Curgenven leading Physic's cob. That good lady had been paying a parochial visit to the Turnipikes, to administer advice, reprimand, and a tract, and her father had promised to walk along the road and meet her as she returned. On leaving the cottage of the Pikes, Jane had found the agent's cob cropping the grass by the roadside, and had arrested it by the bridle, and was leading the animal. She concluded that the agent had hitched his beast up outside a farm or cottage whilst he entered on business, and that it had broken away. She would lead the cob to Curgenven, and then Physic could have it from the stables when he came for it.

'What is the matter?' asked Jane, surprised to see her father careering along the road at so exceptional a rate, so inconsistent with his rectorial dignity.

'Pars'n is right curious,' said Esther. 'I told 'n somethin', and I axed 'n somethin', and it made 'n run like a mazed hare.'

'What was it?'

'It were naught but I told 'n as Lawyer Physic were dead. He be shut through the heart, and I axed 'n to take the pistern and write down what I had to say.'

'Physic dead?'

'Ees. Folks mostly be when they's shut. That's the reason why his cob be a-runnin' loose.'

'Come with me this instant,' said Jane Curgenven. 'Come with me this instant, you abominable girl. Come with me to Mrs. Pike's house. I'll have this cleared up at once, and I'll lock you up there in the coal-hole, till I can send for the police to have you taken to prison.'

'No—not that,' said Esther, with a contemptuous shrug of her shoulders and toss of her glowing head of hair. 'I'll not be took and pinned i' a gaol, not I. But there—take the pistern. Thickey's the chap as did it. Her as shut 'n ain't such a terrible distance off. If you like to say 'twere I, you're welcome. None else were near. That's why I come here, and axed pars'n to take it all down. Now you know about it. There's the pistern, and you can tell the perlice, but take me they shan't.'

She put the pistol into Jane Curgenven's hand, turned, ran up the lane towards the moor, and was lost.

Jane Curgenven with promptitude faced about, and still leading Physic's cob went back to the cottage she had left recently. There she halted at the door, and called out the two eldest children, Tom and Jesse.

'Tom,' said she, 'jump into the saddle, and ride as hard as you can gallop for the police, and here's sixpence for your pains.' Then to herself, 'I must see that Esther be caught and brought to the gallows.'

'Jesse,' said she, 'go as fast as you can toddle for the doctor, and here is twopence for your trouble.' Then to herself, 'I must see what can be done for Physic, before it be too late.'

CHAPTER VII.

CHEATED.

Never within the memory of man was such commotion caused in Curgenven as by the tidings that rapidly spread relative to the murder of Physic, the agent—no, not even by the suicide of Captain Lambert. The latter was a death leading to no very serious consequences, or no more serious consequences than a shift in the squireship. The present death entailed as a corollary a capital trial, and 'some one to swing for it,' as it was expressed. Who that some one was hardly anybody doubted; and it added to the zest of the excitement that this somebody was a female, and one whom all had regarded with suspicion, if not with disgust. The school-master had something to say about it, and to show how it all came of Esther not having reached the second standard. The Scripture reader had something to say about it, and to put it down to her having boiled her kettle with his 'Are you

converted?'—a tract he had specially commended to her. The mission woman had something to say about it. She attributed the crime to Esther's not having been confirmed.

The women of Curgenven village ran in and out of each other's houses, talking over what had taken place. No woman was to be found in her own dwelling; every one had entertained mistrust of Esther; every one had expected that the turning of the Moridegs out of Tolmenna would bring bad luck on the head of Lawyer Physic.

The men congregated after work-hours in the public-house or coffee-tavern, and concurred in their view that it served Physic right; that they did not pity him, yet that nevertheless they could not cordially approve of the method adopted for ridding the estate and neighbourhood of him.

The children in the school could neither do an addition sum rightly nor spell a sentence correctly, the day following the death of Physic. The farmers could get no work done on their farms. The labourers were engaged in discussing the event, not on driving their ploughs.

All day long a train of pilgrims visited the scene of the murder; and all who visited the spot brought away with them some memento of the crime—a blade of grass on which the dead man had lain, a bit of moss stained with blood, a smoked wad from the pistol, a chip off the block of stone against which

his head had rested. In mediæval times people greedily collected relics of martyrs, now-a-days they gather relics of murderers or the murdered with equal greed. The gardeners of Curgenven Hall congregated in the potting-shed and let the fire go out in the furnace that warmed the conservatories. The coachman and grooms sat over the fire in the saddle-room, smoking, and sent into the house for cider, over which to argue relative to the chances of Esther being caught. In the dairy the milk was burnt when the cream was being scalded, and the pigs in the sty went that day without their bucket of wash; but the fowls had a double feed of Indian corn, hastily thrown them by the maid without stopping to measure the proper allowance. In the kitchen the soup was allowed to boil over and perfume the whole house with its savour on the red-hot stove-plate, and the butler sent out a silver egg-spoon and a dessert fork for the kitchen-maid to empty down the sink. No one in all Curgenven could think of anything but the murder, and every one expressed an opinion thereon save two people—the rector, who reserved his, and Theresa, who was not, at her husband's insistence, told of it.

It was known that the police constable had been summoned by Mrs. Curgenven the elder, that she had stated to him how that Esther Morideg had confessed to her the murder of Mr. Physic, and had given her the pistol with which the murder

was committed. It was further known that the constable had viewed the body, along with the surgeon, and found life extinct, and that he had gone off at once to endeavour to arrest Esther in the temporary habitation occupied by her grandparents; that he had failed to find her there, or to obtain any information as to her whereabouts from the old people; that accordingly he had returned to Curgenven, where he had demanded a warrant from Mr. Percival Curgenven, who was a magistrate; and that, armed with this warrant, he had departed for Liskeard to consult the head of the police.

The footman from the Hall was suddenly elevated to being the hero of the day, for he could tell how he had seen Esther Morideg fire out of the window of the bungalow, and how she had asked him to stand that she might have a shot at him, and how she had then and there declared her intention to take the life of Mr. Physic, to which threat he, John Thomas, had not paid much attention at the time, thinking it mere bravado; and he had overheard expressions of anger made use of by the girl at having been dispossessed of the house at Tolmenna, but which now he was ready to swear to before the judges, and stand to. The butler, not to be behind, declared how that he was the last person who had seen Mr. Physic alive, as he had called at the house to inquire after 'Missus.' That cannot have been more than half-an-hour before he was shot.

Then Pike, the horsebreaker, finding that John Thomas was the lion of the day, put in his claim to be a lion also in a degree still higher. He had seen Esther Morideg immediately after the murder walking with the pistol in her hand, and smelling of gunpowder down to her toes. And Esther had told him how that Lawyer Physic were shot. 'But,' said Pike, with a qualm of pity for the girl, 'he would swear before the most intelligent jury, and the oldest and venerablest judge in England, that she said it was pure accident; that is to say, Lawyer Physic had been impertinent to her, and in self-defence she'd done it.'

'Ah!' said some of the women, 'he was a cruel impident piece o' goods.'

'Ise sure,' said a very ugly old spinster, 'he made eyes at me oft enough as though he'd eat me; and what he'd 'a said had I give he the chance the Lord knows.'

But the view that Physic had been killed by accident or by Esther in self-defence did not find general favour. It was not to be denied that the Moridegs had been given the utmost provocation; that the old man had threatened 'to do' for the agent; that he had already been in prison for having attacked him; and it was argued that as the girl had gloried in her grandfather's act, she had endeavoured to outdo it. Then the story rapidly evolved myth about it. Some one had said that

Physic had been killed, not by a bullet from a pistol, but by a slug from the old moor-man's gun. This having been partly overheard, was seized on by the person who half-heard it, and who, being desirous of heightening the tragedy, declared he had heard that when found Physic was half eaten by slugs, that had worked their way into his heart and liver. Whereupon the blacksmith, who set up to be an original thinker and an agnostic, said the whole story was false, no murder had been committed, but the agent had died of a sluggish liver. Some youths who were wont to hang about the forge, or who affected to be free-thinkers, though actually incapable of thinking either freely or in bands, adopted the blacksmith's view, and said that they did not believe in the pistol, and that Esther was an uncommonly handsome girl, and there was no harm in her. It was naught but jealousy and spite accusing her of a crime that had not been committed. Thereupon all the elderly, ugly, and married women, and all the pretty young and unmarried women as well, ran together as drops of mercury and coalesced in one body of opinion, that certainly Esther was guilty, that she was vicious by nature, of a malignant humour, capable of any crime, and entirely devoid of good looks, as she was of Christianity. Finally, the whole population of Curgenven was broken up into factions, one holding that Esther had shot the agent, another that he had been shot

by the grandfather, a third that he had not been shot at all, but had died suddenly of a sluggish liver, or something like it, somehow connected with slugs.

Theresa had returned home in a condition of mental numbness, dominated by terror, not for herself. She did not consider the danger to which she was exposed, she was conscious only of the fact that she had taken a life—that a man who lived, and thought, and schemed, and in his fashion enjoyed himself, had by her act been thrust out of this world through the veil into the unseen.

She had never intended this, never thought of violently sweeping the man who tormented her from her path. She had hoped to frighten him; the rector had suggested that she should do this. She did not know that the pistol was loaded. It had not occurred to her to essay whether it were or not. She had not loaded it herself, and she was too bewildered to be able to consider how it was that it came to be charged with powder and shot, and provided with a cap.

She could see before her everywhere those upturned boot-soles with their patches, one patched across the front, the other half-heeled. Physic trod down his right boot on the inside, and was continually obliged to have pieces put on to rectify the abrasions. In this new portion the nails were bright and of brass, the nails did not show in the older portion

of the sole. If Theresa looked at a picture, the soles stood between her and it, and behind the soles was a black shapeless shadow. If she looked at her bed, the soles were there, thrust out from under the valance; out of the window—they were between her and the landscape. Moreover the scent of the powder followed her. The flowers on her table, the geraniums on the stairs, all exhaled a savour of exploded gunpowder.

Her maid came up with the tray, and beef-tea and toast. The beef-tea steamed like powder, the toast tasted of it. Theresa turned her head aside, she could not endure the food.

Hours passed, the night closed in. She sat looking into the fire, and seeing soles in the coals thrust out between the bars, then disappearing, and fresh boot-soles appearing. She became restless, feverish with impatience when none were distinguishable, waiting, expecting till they re-appeared somewhere among the coals or among the flames.

Then Mr. Curgenven arrived. He had been summoned from the shooting partly to sign a warrant to enable the police to arrest Esther Morideg, suspected of having caused the death of Mr. Physic. He had listened to the story, had done what was required of him, and then gave orders to the servants to maintain silence on the matter before their mistress, whose health would not suffer her to be agitated.

He came up-stairs to see her, to kiss her, take her hand,

and feel whether it were cold or feverish, and inquire how she was. He was shocked and alarmed at her appearance, the stony look of her face, the sunken eyes, the bloodless lips. Never before had she failed to respond to his tenderness, to smile when he came in, and address him with pleasant words of welcome. But now she seemed hardly to see him, the muscles of her face were set as though they would never relax, and her tongue was tied so that she could not speak.

He was concerned. Instead of being better than when he left her, she was markedly worse. He determined to send for the doctor, and urged her at once to go to bed.

She listlessly assented, and, when he had left and sent up her maid, allowed herself to be undressed. But on the servant beginning to remove Theresa's gown, there fell from her breast the long envelope that contained the will. She had forgotten it till that moment. The maid, by stooping to pick it up, attracted her attention; animation was restored, and snatching the envelope from the girl's hands, she said, 'Leave me! Leave me for ten minutes. I do not want you,' and stood trembling and watching till the maid had closed the door behind her.

The fixity in which her faculties had been sealed was gone, exchanged for a flutter of conflicting emotions. She thought now of the will, no more of that ghastly spectacle of

upturned boot-soles on the moor. She had the will—she had that very document for which she had risked so much; and now, with the fire burning in the grate, it was in her power to destroy it, and put an end for ever to the anxiety and threat of trouble this hateful document carried with it.

She hastily tore open the envelope, walked to the dressing-table, where two candles were burning beside the looking-glass, and spread the will out upon the mirror, that she might satisfy her eyes that she really did have in her power the coveted document. She read it through in feverish haste. As she read she recalled every word. It was the same that she had seen at Physic's office, and yet——

She dropped one hand that was holding the paper, and in so doing struck over one of the candles, that fell, and was broken and extinguished on the carpet. She did not notice this, she caught the paper up and held it to the other candle, and looked at the signatures. The paper was not the same.

No, it was not the same. She had been cheated. Physic had passed off on her a copy. On the original was a seal. Lambert had not only signed his name, but after signing it, he had sealed it, out of some fancy that to seal as well as to sign was necessary to give force to such a deed. He had sealed it with his signet that bore the Curgenven crest. On this there was no seal, nothing but the signatures copied. It

was a transcript. A scalding rush of blood poured through the veins of Theresa. After all, Physic had meant to deceive her, to sell her a worthless copy, and retain in his hands the original wherewith still to threaten her.

Every particle of remorse or regret for having caused his death, every atom of pity for the man, died out of her soul, never again to revive. He had brought her that copy with protests of straight dealing, and he had met with his desert.

But a second thought now swelled up in her mind, taking from her breath, and sight, and hearing.

Where was the jewel-case?

She had put it into Physic's hands, and then had endeavoured by a threat to recover it from him. The pistol had been discharged, he had fallen; and in that moment of supreme horror she had forgotten wholly the existence of the case, and that it had been left in his hands.

A sickening terror oppressed her. That case would be found with the dead man, and through it the truth must come out.

How could the truth be concealed? That jewel-case would be recognized, and it would be known that she, and she only, had been in possession of it. The conclusion certain to be reached was that she had had something to do with Physic either immediately before, or at the very moment of his

death. How else could his having the Curgenven jewel-case and the presence of the Curgenven pistol be accounted for? Suspicion must inevitably fall on her—and then!—and then!

The copy of the will was worthless. She threw it into the fire, and when it was consumed, cast herself on the bed and covered her eyes with her hands: not to sleep for one quarter of an hour all that long night; not to toss from side to side, but to lie in one position, with her hands over her burning eyes, thinking, but never reaching any solution that could give her rest.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE SMOKE.

Roger Morideg and his wife were seated in the shed converted temporarily into a habitation; a fire was burning in the middle, a fire of skin turf, and the smoke found its way out as best it might through the thatch, so that from without the hovel had the appearance of a steaming dunghill. To ordinary eyes and lungs the atmosphere within would have been unendurable, but it did not affect either sensibly. Old Roger was adding to the fume by smoking his broken black pipe, and his wife Tamsin was swinging herself whilst knitting, and singing a ballad:

'There was a woman, and a widow was she,
The red, the green, and the yellow!
A daughter she had as the elm tree,[1]
Oh! the flowers that bloom in the valley!'

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[1] The Cornish elm, that grows as a poplar or a pine, small leafed.

Then the old man withdrew his pipe from his mouth and joined in the chorus, taking a third below the melody :

'The harp, the lute, the fife, the flute, and the cymbal,
Sweet goes the treble violin,
Oh ! the flowers that bloom in the valley ! '

The knitter continued :

'There came a knight all clothed in red,
The red, the green, and the yellow !
Oh, and will you be——'

when the door was thrown open and Esther came in.

'Now,' said she, 'give kimbly.[1] I've news.'

'What be it ? No kimbly till I knaws what the news be.'

'Physic is dead—lyin' dead to Tolmenna, and volks do say as I've a shut 'n ! '

'How can that be ? ' asked Roger, turning to where his gun usually hung, but, owing to the smoke, being unable to see it, he put forth his hand and felt it. 'Aye ! here her be. I reckon you can't shut wi'out the instrument to do't wi'.'

''Tis true,' said Esther, 'Physic be lyin' dead, however it be he's a-gotten his death. But this I know, volks 'll put it on me.'

'That's like enough,' said Roger. 'There's reason there.'

'And I must be off and hide, or I'll be ta'en and put i' the

[1] A handsel for good news.

clink where you was, gran'fer, and not get out so soon and so peart as you.'

'Folks 'll put it on us, for sartain sure,' said Tamsin, 'as you, Roger, bear 'n a malice, and I 'a ill-wished 'n. Us 'a said us wished the lawyer-chap dead, and they'll say us killed 'n. It's as true that as fingers be fingers and not toes.'

'It's me, gran'fer, as they'll be after, and I must just run for't. I know very well where I'll go, but I shall want a thing or two, so as——'

'And where's that?'

'I wi'n't tell,' answered Esther. 'Then you can say you dun' know. It's waste o' good words telling lies, and there's no pleasure in it where there's no cause.'

'But how did Lawyer Physic come to die?' asked Roger.

'I'll tell y' what he looks like now, gran'fer,' said Esther. 'But if you ask me how he come to look like this, why, I wi'n't say, not but that I could if I would.'

After she had given a vigorous and graphic account of the condition of the corpse, Roger shook his head.

'You didn't do it wi' a moorstone, that's sartain, nor wi' my gun, for there she be. But lor-a-mussy, what matters how he cam' by his dose o' lead so long as he got it! and no one can't say but sarves him right.'

'And they be after me. They've made up their minds I 'a done it, and I wi'n't be caught and locked up i' Bodmin goal not if I knaws it, I'll run first. So now give me what I want.'

'And what doest a-want?'

'I want a reapin'-hook, and a blanket, and loaf o' bread—that's all.'

'I don't see why you need go,' said Tamsin. ''Tes gran'fer and I hev been most for'ard wi' our words agin' Lawyer Physic, and not you, Esther.'

'Why, if I run, they'll say for sure it be I and not you, and leave you old volks quiet.'

'There's something in that.'

'And second,' said Esther, 'if I didn't do it mysel', why I seed it done, and by a very good friend as I doan't want to hev to send to the gallows; and it's just this, no lies 'd do in this case, else I'd tell them by the scores, and look as simple as any noggy. But they wi'n't do, more's the pity. There's nothin' for't but I must run.'

'There's no hurry,' said the old woman. 'There's no reason to be i' such a tarve. Set you down. You mun eat fust, afore you can run the country, and I've got the taties on the boil now.'

'I don't wish to be ketched here,' said Esther.

'There's no need you should,' answered her grandmother. 'Punch 'll mind the door, and bark if any one comes nigh. Then in the dimmits' (twilight) 'you can go.'

Esther allowed herself to be persuaded. Tamsin proceeded to turn the potatoes into a large earthen bowl; with them were lumps of bacon.

'There now,' she said, 'don't scald your fingers; help yourselves as you likes.'

'I wonder now,' observed the old man, 'who'll get the Tolmenna property? Lawyer Physic warn't married and had no childer, and I never heard as he had kin.'

'Then us may go back agin to the ou'd place,' said Tamsin. 'That'll be brave. But 't 'll be cruel hard work buildin' of her up again.'

'I'd like to know who'd done it,' said the old fellow, shaking his head. ''Tes curious. But I didn't reckon there was any other but myself had the face to do it. And I didn't do it for sure sartain, as I wor sittin' here and singin'. And Esther couldn't 'a done it, best wishes ain't firearms. If it 'ud been a knack wi' a stone, her was ekal to that, but to shut 'n,' he shook his head again, 'her ain't up to them May games.'

Roger leisurely peeled a potato, set it on his knee, and before eating said, 'Why, now, shu'dn't us make it out a case o'

phillideecee ? then there's no trouble to nobody. Ou'd mother there and I can 'a heerd 'n say he was going to do it, and were zick o' life, and cruel uneasy in conscience; and you, Esther, can 'a seed 'n shut hisself, and there we be—no bother to nobody, and satisfactory to every one consarned. Ees, I reckon that'll do it. Wheer now, Esther, did he get the gun ? Was he out after woodcock ? No, that won't come fitty. You sez 'twere done wi' a bullet. Never mind. Gi'e me five minutes, and I'll shape it out—killed hisself, not right in his head, had terrible headaches, and conscience worser.'

'Hist!' said Tamsin.

The dog was barking outside furiously.

'Quick!' said the old woman, as she flung wet heather on the fire, 'you throw yourself down in the farran' (fern), 'and I'll cover you up.'

No sooner said than done; Esther crept behind her grandmother, who at once piled fern, and sticks, and skin turf [1] over her.

The fire poured forth volumes of pungent white smoke that filled the hovel and rolled forth at the door; so dense was it, that the policeman coming up outside, when he looked in could

[1] Of turf on the Cornish moors there are two kinds, the peat turf, dug in the bogs, and the skin turf, a spade-graft off the surface of the moor anywhere taken where not stony.

see nothing; his eyes ran with water, and he coughed as the smoke entered his lungs.

Mrs. Morideg was rocking herself and knitting, droning her song:

'There came a knight all clothed in red,
The red, the green, and the yellow!
"And will you be my bride?" he said,
Oh! the flowers that bloom in the valley!'

And Roger threw in his part lustily:

'The harp, the lute, the fife, the flute, and the cymbal,
Sweet goes the treble violin,
Oh! the flowers that bloom in the valley!'

The old woman continued:

'There came a second all clothed in green,
The red, the green, and the yellow!
And he said, "My fair, will you be my queen?"
Oh! the flowers——'

'Come out! come out, you bedlam hag!' shouted the policeman. 'I'm no more a knight all clothed in green than you are a fair maid.'

'Lor-a-mussy!' exclaimed Roger. 'To think now, it's our good friend Mr. Tregaskis. And it's main glad I be to see you. Step in and hev a pertatie. There be one ready peeled a-coolin' on my knee, and I've a brave bit o' vat bacon atween my fingers. Come now, don't y' be feared that my old 'ooman 'll

cast her eye over y', there be such a pother o' smoke I doubt if that you can see her. Come in, and be hearty welcome now. And if you'll stop, I'll see if I can't find a drop o' sperit to comfort y'.'

'I cannot stay—what a confounded smoke! Where is your daughter Esther?'

'O Lor'!' said Mrs. Morideg, 'doan't y' go a-rippin' up ou'd wounds, Mister Tregaskis. Her's in heavenly glory—eighteen year last Curgenven feast.'

Then she broke out into a song sung through the long length and narrow breadth of Cornwall, and more familiar than 'God save the Queen':

'Don't you zee my Billy comin',
Zittin' on a gou'den cloud?
Gardin' angels zingin' round 'n,
Wrappéd in a goary shroud.'

Then Roger roared out the chorus in bass to the shrill pipe of Tamsin's treble:

'Billy is the lad I do adore,
Billy is my darlin'.
Billy is a-dyin'.
Oh! I fear I shall never zee 'n more!'

'Always meanin',' threw in Mrs. Morideg, 'my poor daughter Esther as a-died, and be now i' glory! Praises, oh! it's groanin' matter, sure. Roger, groan there now, can't y'?'

And both old folks began to groan as at a Revival meeting, and rock themselves as they did so.

'Oh, darn that tatie!' exclaimed Roger. 'Her's trummled off my knee.'

'I do not mean your daughter; I mean that girl, your grandchild,' said the sergeant angrily.

'Ah! now why didn't y' say so, mister? Come in like a friend and sit down, thickey pertatie be gettin' deadly cold, saving where my knee 'a put a little warmth into her. Dear, dear life! now I be main sorry the pertatie be so dirty. Her tum'led on the ground, and my ou'd wife—dirty ou'd toad—han't swept 'n up fitty this mornin'.'

'Where is the girl? I cannot come in, I should be stifled. Can't you throw some of the stuff off the fire?'

'Why, Lor', Mister Tregaskis, us'd set the whole place a-fire if us scattered the trade[1] about; and it 'ud make such a gashly smoke, ye could eat 'n like figgy pudding.'

'Is Esther Morideg within?'

'Esther, Lor', Mister Tregaskis, whativer be you a-thinkin' of? Her's been gone five or six hours. Her went to Dosmare Pool a flint-pickin'.'

'Flint-picking?'

[1] 'Trade' means any sort of material, earth stones, turf, brushwood—in fact anything.

'Aye so, I reckon. Them larned folks to Truro be wun'erful curious about the flints us picks up—and there's a sight on 'em to be gotten to Dosmare, and her picks up a bit o' money that way, and it's as good a way as yourn nor mine, I s'pose.'

'That's false. She has not been to Dosmare. She has been to Tolmenna.'

'Has she though? I'll smack her when her comes home for telling of lies. Her said her was going, but us bain't birds o' the air to fly overhead and see whereabouts her goes. There's one thing I be sure of, her's not runnin' the country after young men, as some maids does I could name.'

'I know nothing about that,' retorted the policeman. 'What I want to know is—that Esther is not here.'

'I've told y' so.'

'Yes, but that does not satisfy me.'

'Well, then, come in and look round for yourself.'

'I can't bear the smoke.'

'There, now, and I couldn't a-bear to be laced up in them tight clothes as you be; it all comes o' edication. I think nothin' o' the smoke; nor will you if you come in, and sit here and eat the pertaties. In ten minutes you'll be right enough.'

The policeman stepped within, coughing and blinking.

'I'll try to get up a flame,' said Tamsin, throwing on a furze-

bush that did indeed blaze up and fill the hovel with light; in the dense smoke, however, little could be distinguished.

'The pertatie is waitin' for y',' said Roger. 'Look at 'n settin' on my knee and axin' to be eaten.'

'I want none of your potatoes,' replied the policeman, irritated by the smoke. 'I will satisfy myself the girl is not within.'

'Shall I make more blaze, Mister Tregaskis?' asked Tamsin.

'I don't think it helps much. Where is your gun?'

'Here,' answered Roger with alacrity. 'I haven't used 'n for half an age. Smell to his mouth; it be sweet as the breath o' a baby.'

He handed the old gun through the smoke to the policeman, who took it outside, and applied his nose to the barrel, and looked at the lock with watery eyes, then passed it back again. Mrs. Morideg began to knit, rock herself, and sing:

'The moon doth shine so bright in the sky,
The red, the green, and the yellow!
"Come out, come out!" did the green knight cry,
Oh! the flowers that bloom in the valley!'

And she and old Roger, at the top of their voices, with something of triumph and mockery in the tone, roared the chorus:

'The harp, the lute, the fife, the flute, and the cymbal,
Sweet goes the treble violin——'

'Be silent, will you?' shouted the policeman, nettled at his want. of success, altogether beaten by the fumes of the fire. 'I'll tell you what, you howling savage, I'll tear a hole in the roof, and let this darned smoke out, and then I'll be able to ransack the whole piggery!'

'Oh, my dear!' exclaimed Mrs. Morideg, 'that'll never do. What will Farmer Hext say to that up to Trewortha? This bain't no house o' ourn; her's but lent to we. He'll hev the law on you, sure as you'rn a real perliceman, that he will.'

'Then I'll come in and grope into every corner. I believe Esther is here.'

'And what be you a-come after my Esther for?' asked Tamsin. 'I know you've had a soort of a fancy for she. Is it honourable, and you be courtin' of she? Why, I always heard say as you was a respectable chap. So if you means it honourable, come along.'

'It's nothing of the sort,' said the policeman. 'Come, turn out of this house, and let me in; I'll soon have done with the fire and smoke, and let some daylight into the place.'

'Not so, mister!' replied Roger; 'I'm not to be turned out o' this house as I was from t'other. Show me your warrant first, I say.'

With this the policeman was not then provided. He had come on at once in quest of Esther, denounced as the murderess

by Mrs. Curgenven. He knew enough of the extent of his power, and that he might get into trouble if he went beyond it.

He stood outside for a moment or two, racking his brain to discover what was best to be done, whilst the dog Punch snarled and barked round him, and made a rush at his calves whenever he attempted to enter the hovel. Then ensued a fresh glare within, accompanied by a dense outpour of smoke. The old woman had heaped fresh fuel on the fire.

It was not possible for civilized lungs and eyes to endure the fume, and he turned to leave, in ill-humour with himself, and especially with the Moridegs. But he had not taken half-a-dozen steps from the door before he was rapped on the shoulders by the gun-barrel, and turning sharply, saw Esther, who had sprung through the door and held her grandfather's fowling-piece.

'Ah! I knew you were there. Now I'll arrest you. I arrest you in the Queen's name on a charge of murder.'

'No—you do not touch me,' said Esther. 'Come a-courtin' o' me, is it? Why, Tregaskis, you're the first man as has. And I tell y' what, you mun ketch me afore you can call me yourn. Give me the start, and let us run.'

'In the Queen's name, I arrest you,' said the policeman, stepping towards her.

'Nay! you'll not catch me that road,' said Esther, with a

laugh. 'Us'll have rare games, us will. Tip and run. See, Tregaskis!' She brought the muzzle of the barrel down on his shoulder, and then flung the fowling-piece away. 'There, I'm off; tip and run. Ketch me if you can!'

And like a fawn she leaped a bank and went as a fawn bounding over the moor. Tregaskis shook his head. He could not follow, or were he to follow, it would not be with the smallest prospect of catching the girl.

CHAPTER IX.

BROWN WILLY.

Esther fastened two ends of the blanket—a thin one—round her neck, wearing it as a mantle, tucked another end under one arm where she carried the loaf, and started, a reaping-hook in her right hand, bound by the handle to a long stick, on her way north-west.

She passed the stream that flows into the Trewortha Marsh from the west, and climbed the round hill above it, in the midst of which is an outcrop of sparry granite that bears a fanciful resemblance to a grey mare, and which accordingly bears this name. Esther had arranged with her grandparents that food and sundry articles she might need were to be left for her at intervals among the rocks of the Grey Mare; then she went over a long down sparsely strewn with granite, much skinned accordingly for turf, and away to where, like a white ribbon, the great Bodmin road, the main line of communication

in former days between London and Falmouth, crossed hill and dipped into dale in the undulating surface of the moor between the main groups of mountainous outcrops of granite. Here were a few farms clustered about the road, with their enclosures taken from the waste built round with the stones cleared from the ground within.

To the north, in the gathering gloom, but with some of the western halo from the set sun reflected over their barren crests, rose ridge on ridge against the dark north-eastern sky. Already, under the granite-crowned Garrah, a star shone forth, where in a solitary farm a lamp had been kindled.

Esther crossed the Bodmin road without encountering any one, and plunged into the wilderness beyond, a wilderness not to be trodden and threaded by daylight by such as are inexperienced and unacquainted with the country, on account of the wide expanses of unfathomed bog occupying old lake basins.

Esther was well aware of the danger, but she knew her direction, knew that the moon was near full and would shortly rise over the ridge to the east; and she was also well acquainted with the position of the dangerous morasses, and of the points where the streams could be crossed, none deep so near their cradle.

Like a dark purpose in a sullen, tortuous mind, the river

Fowey wormed its way through the moors. Never seen, hardly heard in its whispering falls, it could not be gathered where it worked and turned, and dived and fretted. Esther kept to the heights, now traversing whole villages of ancient circular huts, some within pounds and fortifications, some outside, at what date tenanted none knew. Now and then she startled a couched moor colt or a heifer, or a frightened curlew with a whirr and scream rose from under her feet. Then she made Tolborough, with its cairn crowning the summit, a chambered cairn with a passage leading into its depths, where dwelt the pixies.

She passed without fear, the Good People had never hurt her. She belonged to them; they would protect her when taking refuge in their domain, their last refuge from the encroaching plough and the sound of church bells. Here she turned and looked back. Darkness had gathered behind her as a misty sable sea flowing in between all the mountain tops to the east, pouring down into the bottoms and filling them with gloom, whilst, silvery and ghostlike, their granite heads still caught the light. But out of this dark shadow she saw Dosmare like a large eye looking up at the night heavens, waiting to see the moon sail above it and to reflect it in its waveless surface; Dosmare, the sole remaining lake of the cluster that once occupied the basins in this upland region.

On again, now warily picking her way among the rocks of Coddah and down into the great basin below Brown Willy, where springs rise and the 'old men' had burrowed after tin, and bogs have swelled and overflowed and occupied the ancient works.

A horrible death-like odour rose from the bogs, an odour as of an overcrowded graveyard; and graveyards these vast bogs are, that have swallowed and contain in their abysses the bones of departed races of beasts that once ranged the moors, and relics of ancient peoples who worked there, and who have disappeared like the elk and urochs, the wolf and hyæna.

Before Esther, against the northern sky, stood the black mass of the highest of the Cornish ridges, like a mighty wave rolling in on her to submerge her in the trough below. She seated herself on a stone and waited. She dared not go forward into that same trough till light came. As she sat, she was as one in a lost, untenanted world. Not a sound of any living being, of a bird, or insect was audible. The outline of the mountain before her was undefined—whether on account of gathering vapour from the Atlantic or in night shadows she could not tell. And now, sitting there in the chill air, in absolute solitude, she begins in her undisciplined mind to ask herself why she was there.

Why, indeed, had she run away, and was hiding, when she had done no harm to any one?

She had acted on impulse, the first impulse of a warm heart. Few there were who had been kind to her, but among those few was Theresa Curgenven. She had wits enough to know that what Theresa had done might bring her to a shameful death, a death that would heap disgrace on the family to which belonged Justinian and Alice, the only persons she loved outside her grandparents' hovel. But that was not all. She, and she alone, had seen Physic shot. And although with her lack of moral education she had no scruples about speaking and even swearing to what was not the truth, she was afraid lest if brought to cross-examination by 'them lawyer chaps,' the truth might be extorted from her.

The idea of taking the crime on herself had sprung up unprompted in her rude mind as the readiest way of relieving Theresa. She was confident that she could elude pursuit on her native moors. A regiment of soldiers could not catch her—she had a thousand lurking-places. She knew that not a moor farmer or his men would 'turn cat-in-the-pan' on her, in other words, betray her whereabouts, should they guess or come to know it, not only because they would dread the vengeance of her grandmother, but because they regarded her as belonging to themselves, the moor-folk, in contradistinction to

the lowland people. And, as she sat musing, she laughed merrily and beat her hands together. There was sport in leading the police a wild-goose chase, in drawing them off on a false scent. She had not, as a child, played games with the school-children; now, on the confines of womanhood, she would play such a May game as was unsurpassed and unsurpassable; and so, with this game, take farewell of childhood. She had laughed aloud. There was no echo, not the smallest reverberation, her voice went forth into and was lost in space.

But now there was a brightening in the eastern sky, and first a spark, then a flame, then a globe of fire rose above the moors, and a flood of light was poured over the flank of Brown Willy. Not over its five heads, for the crest had, in fact, arrested fog from the Atlantic that blew over it, blew between the points of its comb, arched over the great trough below, which was suffused with silver moonlight, and the vapour above was itself turned into light like the silken streamers of the cotton-grass in the marsh.

With a shout of exultation, Esther sprang to her feet, and the full moon flashed from her reaping-hook, turning it into a silver crescent.

Down the slope of Coddah Esther went, her feet bounding on the wet turf; she saw the flash of water in Fowey Well, a

pool where the river bearing that name is supposed to rise. She almost ran down, for she was chilled with sitting in the cold night air and falling dew, and having reached the bottom crossed it, and began to climb the side of Brown Willy. As she ascended, the silvery streamers of fog were dispersed, and the five-horned head of the mountain stood out illuminated by the moon, turned into silver against the night sky. A steep scramble, and then at length, now glowing in every limb, the girl stood on the summit of the most eastern point. Here rises an immense cairn above some ancient Cornish king. Here the dead man lies with a golden goblet in his hand, and he turns his cup from side to side. When he is thirsty, he turns the bowl to the west, and thereupon the wind blows from the ocean and brings up rain that pours through the chinks of his grave and fills the cup. The dead man holds it till full, and then drinks. If his tongue be slaked, he turns the bowl downward and the wind shifts, the clouds disperse, and the sun shines. But he has his thirsty fits full often, and when they are on him rain falls incessantly, and the fire that consumes him seems unquenchable.

'To-night,' laughed Esther, 'the ou'd king hev took but a dewdrop in his cup and gone to sleep again.' Then she descended the further side of the crest, and found what she had come to find, her place of shelter—a house ready built, but

untenanted since the times of the old king of the golden cup, who lay immediately overhead.

This house is a beehive hut composed completely of granite blocks nestling in among the natural rocks, like a swallow's habitation; so like the natural rocks in colour and appearance, that probably ninety-nine persons out of a hundred might pass within a stone's throw of it without observing it. It is completely circular, six feet in diameter within, the walls are perfect, and stand above the paved floor but three feet; and then the roof is drawn together in overlapping courses, except where one huge slab has been thrust over a portion. The little doorway is to this day intact. The house could be entered on hands and knees alone, between granite jambs under a granite lintel. Attached to it is a still smaller beehive hut, that served anciently as store-chamber. The hut was indeed the mere skeleton, unvested in its original covering of turf that excluded wet and cold, but such as it was Esther was constrained to make it her habitation for the rest of the night.

She had been walking for some hours, and was hungry and tired. She broke off a piece of the loaf she carried and ate it for her supper, then, having wrapped herself up in the blanket, she laid herself in the driest recess of the hut and was soon asleep.

When morning broke she was shivering with cold. A hasty breakfast was made on her loaf, and then she set to work upon her house to make it rain and wind tight. This was not difficult. She cut up turf and stopped all the chinks between the stones; she cleared out all the peat and mould that had accumulated through some two thousand years on the floor; she reaped heather and strewed it on the pavement to form a bed, and then proceeded to weave rushes for a mat that she could hang over the entrance at night. Upon the roof she heaped turves that she found at the places where the peat-cutters had stacked their stores to dry, and had neglected or cast aside as indifferent slabs. The day was thus spent, occupying all her energies and intelligence, to the reduction of the size of the loaf.

A fire she dared not kindle, had she possessed the means of lighting one. She was living at the highest point in all Cornwall, at a point commanding two seas. Far away to the south was Plymouth Sound, and gleaming like an arm of fire in the declining sun; to the west was the estuary of the Camel, Padstow Bay. A light at such an elevation would be seen far and wide, and must attract attention. Only in rain and mist could she venture to kindle one; but, so far, rain and mist had happily not come upon her.

The day was over, and in her beehive hut in the darkness

sat Esther, plaiting the rushes to complete her screen. The wind piped and fluttered about the entrance. A soft silvery-grey light was discernible at her narrow doorway. She sang to herself snatches of old ballads her grandmother had taught her; then laid her plaiting down in her lap, unable to proceed in the darkness, and listened to the play of the wind and to the tumble and roar of her own stormy pulses, and think as best she could the thoughts that flashed in her dark mind. They came one on another; now a thought of her grandparents, then of Justinian, next of how she was giving the police the slip, then of the murdered man, and not in order but in a whirl, and dancing over and flashing through them, fancies of the king with his golden cup; of Tregeagle, the giant, who churned Dosmare with his staff till it foamed like a cauldron; of the pixies dancing round the cairn on Tolborough.

Then, suddenly, she was startled by a scream, loud and piercing, in her ear, and a flutter near her feet.

She shrank against the stone at her back, drawing her feet under her in terror, and holding her breath.

Glimmering in the dark were a pair of eyes, now flashing, then disappearing like a revolving light at sea.

The moon rose, and a flood of pure light poured in at her doorway, and in that light she saw what had alarmed

her, a snowy owl, white in itself, dazzling white in the moonbeam.

It had come to warn her to depart from a haunt it called its own.

CHAPTER X.

ESTHER'S ADVOCATES.

Percival Curgenven, as both magistrate and employer of the deceased Mr. Physic, considered himself bound to take active measures to have the case of the murder cleared up, and the murderess brought to justice. Not that his activity was productive of result. He ran about talking, drove into Liskeard to consult a lawyer, discuss the matter with the superintendent of the police, dine at the ordinary at Webb's Hotel, and make the murder the subject of discussion at table; and after having laid strict injunctions on the servants and on Justinian not to mention the matter before his wife, lest it should excite and harm her, was himself the first to transgress, and blurt the whole matter out before her.

There had been a coroner's inquest, and, under the circumstances, with such evidence as was produced before the jury, the verdict was one of murder against Esther Morideg. But

then, in this case, as in that of Captain Lambert, and ten thousand others, all the evidence necessary for the direction of coroner and jury into a right finding was not produced.

Justinian was in the smoking-room of the bungalow engaged in trying to get into working order a piece of Captain Lambert's mechanism, a tumbler made to go through numerous and varied evolutions by the fall of sand into buckets of different sizes, rendering the revolutions more or less irregular, and thus changing the attitudes of the tumbler. The toy had been neglected and had got out of order. He had removed the back of the box that contained the mechanism and was studying the contrivance, when a tap at the window-pane called off his attention, and he saw the sweet face of Alice looking in at him. He started up, and ran out to her, but met her in the doorway coming in.

'Alice, I have found out the secret of the little man who pirouettes,' said Justinian. 'See—this is how your father managed it. Was it not clever?'

'Oh, never mind that,' said the girl. 'I am so anxious and unhappy about Esther Morideg. I suppose you know that the coroner has given out that she shot Mr. Physic, and I am quite sure it is not true.'

'I *know* it is not true,' said Justinian.

'So do I; but why is all this hue-and-cry after her when she is innocent?'

'Because they will have it that she shot him. How do you know, Alice, that she is innocent?'

'I am sure of it. She couldn't do it. She is as good-hearted a girl as ever was found; wild and uneducated of course, but that does not make her wicked. She is not wicked. Justin, I am positive she never did it, because she could not do it.'

'I don't think your reasons convincing.'

'But I know her.'

'So do I. I don't believe she could do it, though the provocation was great.'

'I am quite positive she did not.'

'My reasons are better than yours, Alice. I know she is innocent for reasons that do carry conviction with them. You see, men and women have different sorts of intellects. You say she is innocent because you like her and think her a nice sort of a girl; I say so because I have evidence that exculpates her. That is the difference in sex.'

'What are your reasons?'

'Why, this—I know that the pistol was in its place when I came here for my gun. Look, Alice, there is the rack. There is my gun, and there is the governor's, and do you see that gap

below? There is where the pistol was. You know we were at Sir Sampson's. My step-mother had a fit, or something of the sort, and a servant was sent to recall the governor and me. We came back, and I took the gov.'s gun and put that, as well as mine, here on the rack, and I am positive the pistol was in place. Then, as my step-mother was better, and wished us to go back to the Tregonticks', I came here for the guns again, and the pistol was still in its place. I remember noticing then that it had a cap on, but as the hammer was down, I couldn't say whether it was an old one or not, I was in too great a hurry to examine at the time. Those owls of police have got the pistol now, and so you see there is a gap in the rack. Well, when I came here for the guns, don't you think I should have at once noticed had the pistol been away? I don't know what girls are, whether they are observant or not, but all I can say is that men see these things at once with half an eye. The pistol was in place. I noticed the copper of the cap under the hammer, and determined I'd row the keeper about it, for he ought to have had the pistol cleaned. I could swear to it. And yet these fools have it that Esther carried it off a day or two ago, after having frightened John Thomas with a threat that she would pepper his fat calves with it. It's rubbish!'

'But—Justin! why have you not said this? Why did you not let the coroner and the jury know this?'

'I wasn't going to appear before a pack of idiots unless specially sent for. Why, Alice, who do you think they had for jury? There was Tonkin, the fellow who has that little omnium gatherum shop, boots and lollipops, groceries and drapery. There was Hicks, who is only a day labourer, and so deaf that he misunderstands everything said to him, and Uglow the butcher. Do you think I, the young squire, was going to come before a parcel of bumpkins and give evidence? Not I. If there should be a trial, and a respectable jury of educated and intelligent men, I'll go and say my say, but I'm not the man to cast pearls before swine.'

'Oh, Justin! you have done very wrong. Poor Esther is in trouble and danger, and all through you.'

'Not a bit. They are such a pack of stupids, that I knew they would bring in their verdict in defiance of my evidence, if I gave it; and I was not going to submit to that—I, the young squire, indeed! Besides, who is the coroner? He's only old Grimston, who is a second-class lawyer, and the son of an auctioneer, and married the daughter of the cake-shop. When there's a proper judge and respectable jury, then I'll say my say.'

'And in the meantime poor Esther is to be hunted and perhaps thrown into prison.'

'Oh! you let Esther take care of herself. What does she care about what old Grimston, and Uglow, and Hicks, and that lot decide concerning her? I wouldn't care a snap myself. Let them say I shot Physic. I should laugh in their faces. Why, Hicks is as stupid as he is deaf. Who cares for their opinion except their wives?'

'But your father thinks Esther is guilty.'

'Yes — it is unfortunate. He is rather — well, he is swayed too much by general opinion, which is what I despise. Indeed, I may say I am convinced that when general opinion sets one way, truth is to be found in the opposite direction.'

'Did you not tell your father about the pistol?'

'Yes, but he did not listen, or give what I said its proper weight. You see unfortunately I am only his son, and a father, I suppose, is always inclined to undervalue a son's opinion and intellect, and so on. Besides, he is rather obstinate, though I say it, and he has made up his mind that Esther killed Physic, and he will stick to his opinion as a matter of principle, just because he has formed his opinion. It is a misfortune when people do not listen to reason, but, after all, they are the sufferers.'

'Not in this case, Justin. It is poor Esther who is the sufferer. What is to be done about her?'

'I don't know.'

'But the truth cannot be arrived at till she is found.'

'Then let them find her.'

'No—do not let her be caught by the police and carried to gaol, and lie in prison, regarded as a murderess, till the assizes. It would kill her to be confined within stone walls.'

'There is something in that. And that is why she has given them the slip.'

'Yes, but where is she? I wish she could be seen and spoken with, then we would find out something about this. Now every one says she murdered Mr. Physic, and I don't believe it, and never shall be brought to believe it.'

'Nor will I,' said Justinian.

'Then it is our duty to stand by her, and help her to clear herself. Justin! she is a poor uneducated creature, and quite unable to establish her own innocence. Every one is against her except you and myself, and you and I must be her advocates, and do what we can to clear her.'

'I should enjoy doing it,' said Justinian, 'if only for the sake of letting the world know that our opinion is worth attending to. And it would teach the governor a salutary lesson, too.'

'Then do something to establish Esther's innocence.'

'What? I am game so soon as the proper authorities are prepared to listen to my evidence.'

'That is not sufficient. You must find Esther out; learn where she is, see her, and get her to tell you what she knows. There is some mystery. It may be she is trying to screen her grandfather. I cannot account for her playing hide-and-seek in any other way. If not that, then something has happened to her.'

'I will do what you wish. If she is in concealment, her grandparents will know. Leave it to me to worm the truth out of them. I understand all that sort of thing better than those blundering owls of police. Of course the Moridegs would tell them nothing; *me*—that's altogether different.'

'Thank you very much, Justin. I am so troubled at heart about the poor girl. I do like her. There is a great deal more in that girl than most people imagine.'

'I'll go directly. Nothing like knocking off a thing at once.'

'Do so; and tell her—tell her, Justin, that nothing will make me believe she did this dreadful thing intentionally. Mamma does not know her as I do.'

Justinian started for Trewortha. He did not ride his cob because the way was very bad, so rough with stones in places,

and so boggy in others, that it would have taken him longer to reach the place on horseback than on foot.

As he approached the throat of the valley where the Trewortha Tor throws out its feet against those of Newel Tor on the other side of the stream, he saw the policeman lounging about, as though he had nothing to engage him.

Justin accorded him a supercilious nod and was rushing past, when the constable said, 'Excuse me, sir, but may I ask where you are going?'

'Where I am going?' repeated Justinian haughtily; 'what the deuce is that to you? Do you know who I am? I call this cheek, I do. As if I might not be where I chose. I suppose these moors do not belong to you, Mr. Tregaskis, but are free to any one to cross?'

'Oh, certainly, sir. Only I was——'

'Only you were wholly unwarranted in asking such a question of me. I take it as impertinence.'

Then Justinian walked on, switching at the heads of fern and gorse, at anything on which he could vent his disgust.

Presently he turned his head over his shoulder and looked back. The constable was following at a distance. He clenched his teeth, stood and hacked at a thistle with his stick till he had hacked it to the ground, looked back, and saw the policeman still coming on.

Then he strode to meet him, and said haughtily, 'Are there not other ways than this to Trewortha? What do you want there? or—may I flatter myself that you are following my traces?'

'I beg pardon, Mr. Justinian; I had no wish to offend, but I have my duty to discharge.'

'Well, and what is that?'

'Why, I have to catch that party, sir—beg pardon—Esther Morideg.'

'Then, why do you not catch her?'

'She is hiding from us.'

'If hiding, why do you come to Trewortha? You are not likely to find her there. Of all owlishness that ever was, there is nothing like that of the rural police!'

The constable was nettled.

'Well, sir, you may say that if you choose. I know very well she is not at Trewortha; but seeing as you was a-keeping company with her——'

'What!' Justinian's face became scarlet.

'No offence, sir; I suppose it's no secret. All the country knows that you've been keeping company with Esther, and walking out with her.'

'And so——'

'And so I thought you might perhaps know where she be.

And, sir, let me tell you, if you do, it would be better to tell me. No offence, but seeing you coming this way, and thinking you might know, or come to know, where she is, I thought I might take on me to give your honour a caution that it would be a serious matter to assist in any way to conceal her or get her off. It would make you, sir, an accessory.'

'I think this an insufferable piece of impertinence,' said Justinian indignantly. 'To talk of me—of *my* keeping company—and then as an accessory. I'll tell you what it is, Tregaskis; I'll speak to my father, who is a justice of peace, and get your name struck off. It is intolerable to have police so insolent. Turn your nose in another direction, please, and do not dog my footsteps.'

'I must do my duty, sir.'

Justinian swung himself about and proceeded on his way, panting with anger, his brow suffused with colour from shame and indignation. He wished heartily now he had never met with, never condescended to be gracious to a common girl such as Esther. 'Vulgar people will make their vulgar comments; they imagine what does not exist.' He had half a mind now not to proceed, but he had made a promise or given an assurance to Alice that he would see the Moridegs, and so he must go forward.

In no good humour he approached their hovel, and almost ran against Esther coming to it from an opposite direction.

At the same moment that he saw her, so did the constable, who gave a shrill call on his whistle, and began to run. Instantly there started up three more constables from behind rocks and the mounds that marked the sites of prehistoric habitations, and ran also, concentrating on the hut of the Moridegs.

Esther saw that she must be captured if she remained, and she turned. She looked first at one then at another of those running towards her before she resolved on her course, and then bounded down the slope and darted out on the marsh.

CHAPTER XI.

ACROSS THE MARSH.

Trewortha Marsh is probably unique anywhere. Being an old lake-bed silted up with the wash from the granite tors that surround it on every side, all which granite tors are more or less impregnated with tin, the bed of the lake is to a large extent a settlement of the metal. The ruins of villages of all ages from prehistoric antiquity, which cover the slopes of the hills that dip into the morass, are those of mining peoples of different races and languages, who at different times have sought to recover the sunken treasure.

They have waited till the water was low that they might turn up the bed of the lake; they have toiled at the granite barrier to saw through it and let the water off; they have dammed the streams back that flowed into it; but the lake-bed has never yet been thoroughly explored—never had more than its shoals turned over. Here and there is, as it were, an

island in the wide expanse where the water was so shallow that it could be dyked out, and the rubble explored for tin till the metal it yielded was exhausted, or till the dykes gave way, and the water overflowed again and covered all save the heaps of discarded refuse thrown up by the diggers.

But it was not tin alone that Trewortha Marsh offered to explorers; it yielded gold as well, though not in large quantities; and a squire whose land stretched up to it in the seventeenth century boasted of the heavy gold rings that he had obtained from the precious ore recovered from the marsh, and gave to his daughters.

The fact of the lake morass having been searched over wherever practicable by man has made its surface most unequal. Here, a little above the level, rises a grey tract of crumbled granite that has been turned over and thrown up. There, again, are depths which the miners at one time by great effort kept dry, and searched till they were abandoned to the dark peat-water again. Here are tracts of quaking swamps that seem fathomless, over which a tripping foot may pass on the green moss, but which will engulf any one who stands still for a minute. There are courses of dark water too wide to be overleaped and too deep to be waded through.

Into this morass many an ox has run and sunk and dis-

appeared. It is said that men who have ventured to attempt to cross it have perished in like manner. Treacherous, deceptive, a maze to whoever enters it, in one place alone can the moor-man pass over it who is aware of its intricacies and acquainted with the secret of the track.

The keen, observant eye of Esther had seen that her sole chance of escape lay in traversing the marsh. A policeman had sprung from behind a rock on the further side of the stream that flowed into the basin, and would pursue her if she attempted the moor on that side. Another had appeared in the direction of the Grey Mare, to intercept her should she endeavour to return by the way she had come; and to run up the stream was not to be thought of, not only because Constable Tregaskis was coming down it, but also because it led in the direction of cultivated and inhabited land. She must return to the depths of the wilderness, and her only way of returning to it was over the surface of the marsh in whose abysses lay the city Tresillan. Happily, she knew the track.

Many a Sunday had she stepped from hummock to hummock of rushes and from spit of rubble to islet of gravel till she had reached that spot in the marsh where, far down, lay the church of Tresillan, whose bells could be heard tolling for service in the dark peat-water; and often had the fancy taken her that she heard the sunken bells.

Esther did not run out far on the marsh before, in full confidence of her security, she turned, folded her arms, and looked at her pursuers.

Three of the constables were making for the morass, from the several places where they had been when they first saw her. Esther laughed. She knew that they could not reach her. Tregaskis was coming after her, following exactly her course. She was not afraid of him. She could throw him out. Then her eye went in search of Justinian, and she saw him running, not towards the marsh, but along its bank, leaping the divisions that marked the old boundaries of paddocks and fields and pounds of the ancient settlers, making in the direction of the Grey Mare. Esther had been obliged to come to the habitation of her grandparents because she had exhausted her provision of food. She had gone, as appointed by her, to the Grey Mare, and had found nothing there. The reason was that the old Moridegs knew that they were watched; they were well aware that if either of them went to the granite mass called the Grey Mare, he or she would be followed, and the deposit of bread there would be found, and that then an ambush would be laid for Esther. After consultation together they deemed it advisable not to carry anything to the Grey Mare. If Esther discovered nothing there, she would know that they were precluded from

visiting the spot, and would make an attempt to obtain food elsewhere. At any rate, it would be a notice to her that her grandparents were prevented from following the arrangement made. Esther had understood this. But food she must have. She might, she knew, venture into some farmhouse or cottage on the moor and beg there; but though the elder inmates might not betray her, yet there was risk from the chatter of the children. She therefore preferred to run the risk of going to her grandfather's habitation, trusting in her own agility and knowledge of the marsh for escape should she be pursued. Unhappily, she had been observed before she had time to obtain from her grandparents what she so much needed.

Esther waited on a heap of 'streamer's' refuse till she saw that Tregaskis was within a stone's throw of her, and then, with a taunt cast back at him, she started again. Light and elastic, her foot not resting for more than a throb of the pulse on the yellow-green surface of moss, she passed over a tract of quaking bog. To reach it she had leaped; for a bog of this description has its margin so fine and filmy as to be incapable of sustaining the weight, whereas a little further on it is dense as velvet-pile. Across this Esther literally danced. She turned her head for a moment over her shoulder, and in that moment saw the constable disappear. He had attempted

to follow her on the quaking bog, and had gone in. He sank at once to the armpits, and only saved himself from going under altogether by throwing out his arms and clutching at the moss.

Being in, to extricate himself was not possible. He must shout to his fellows to bring poles to lay across from the more solid ground upon the bog, by which he might clamber out.

Another of the constables was running in bewildered fashion up and down a tongue of rushy land that was a peninsula, with a wide reach of unfathomable bog-water on every side of it save that by which he had come out upon it. Advance was impossible. A third had come to the conclusion that he could not thread the mazes of the swamp, and was endeavouring to return to the mainland, but could not find how to retrace his steps.

Meanwhile the old Moridegs—Roger, with pipe in mouth and hands thrust into his pockets, and Tamsin, with a scarlet kerchief tied round her throat—were standing outside their hovel, watching the proceeding with a stolidity that seemed indifference. Esther saw by a motion of her grandmother's arm that she desired to catch her attention. She stood still, and detected that she pointed hastily to the Grey Mare.

No sooner did Esther perceive this, than she bent her steps

in a different direction, so as to deceive her pursuers as to where she purposed leaving the marsh.

As she went on, she disturbed many wild-fowl that had made of this region their home and breeding-place. In 1680, an old squire who lived at Trebartha Hall, the nearest residence of a gentleman, composed a poem on the charms of his place, and did not forget to celebrate the virtues of the great marsh :

> To fine fowling he that is a lover
> Of that delightful sport
> Let him streight here resort.
> He cannot miss of duck, cock, tail [teal], and plover,
> Widgeon, nor wild goose, hearn [heron], and snite [snipe],
> Nor dove, nor thrush, nor hatterflight [jack-snipe],
> Heathpoult, nor partridge, nay, nor pheasant.
> If this don't please, I know not what is pleasant.

In one place Esther came across the horns of an ox protruding from the bog. The brute had got in, and had sunk, holding up its head with the nostrils above the enclosing peat, till that had covered them, then it had suffocated, but had not sunk further, and the white horns still gleamed out of the grey moss that formed a film over the treacherous surface. Toads, water-voles, leaped into the ooze as she disturbed them, or wild-duck whirred away.

At length Esther came upon an islet of rubble on which were cairns and mounds, marking temporary habitations of

searchers for gold or tin, who had remained on the spot instead of returning nightly to the mainland through the dangerous swamp. From this place she could see that the constables had recovered Tregaskis from his dangerous position, and were making towards that point on the margin where they conjectured Esther would leave the morass for the bank.

She made her way on in the same course as before, till she came within a bowshot of the margin, when she turned sharply round, retraced her steps over the morass, and sped as fast as she could towards the north, took the one ford over the stream that wormed its way through Trewortha, and reached a long arm of firm land that ran into the morass, and was crowned by two barrows, under which lay some of the dead who had once toiled for gold or tin in the marsh. This arm was so slightly raised above the water, that to such as did not know the contour of the land it was overlooked, yet, having reached it, an immense advantage was gained by Esther, as she was able to run along on it as fast as her feet could carry her, without any impediment to stay her. By this means she reached easily the main bank of moor-land, whereas her pursuers were left a mile in the rear, and moreover to reach her had to make a difficult circuit.

Relaxing her speed, she now ascended the down, among the tufts of whortle, and whin, and heather, at her leisure, till she

reached the Grey Mare, where she found Justinian, who had made for it in a direct line, at the recommendation of Roger Morideg. He was lying with his back against the rock, and was behind it.

'Look here, Esther,' said he, 'I have brought you a loaf your grandfather gave me. He told me to come to this point. I don't half like it, though. You see, my father is a magistrate, and it looks ugly for me to connive at your escape. Of course I don't believe you have murdered old Physic, and what is more, Alice has commissioned me to tell you that she believes you are innocent. All the same, I don't like to seem to favour your escape from the police.'

'Her says I never killed 'n?' Esther tossed her head.

'Yes,' said Justinian. 'My cousin, Miss Alice Curgenven'—he had before said 'Alice,' and regretted it. He now gave her her proper title. 'My cousin, Miss Alice, has enjoined me to assure you that nothing will ever make her believe that you committed the crime. I myself——'

'You don't think me that wicked, do y'?'

'No, I do not. I know very well that there is a mistake somewhere, but where, I am at present unprepared to say.'

'So'—Esther was pleased, and smiled—'so you and Miss Alice sez Esther bain't so bad as volks say.'

'Exactly. Only we do not understand your conduct in running away.'

'And she—what does she say?'

'Whom do you mean by *she?*'

'Why, sure—who but your step-mother?'

'I don't think she has said anything about it. She has been, and is still, very unwell. She has not been out of her room for some days.'

'Look y' here,' said Esther, laying hold of Justinian by the arm, and speaking with vehemence. 'You mind and say to her just what I tells to you. You go to her and say, "Esther—her'll die game and never speak." Do y' understand now?'

'I don't understand. I don't see how I can. I will say this to her, but I'd like to know what concern it is to her. What have you to do with Mrs. Curgenven?'

'Aye—she loves me.'

'Does she? That's news. Now, Esther, I can't stay here. See—the men, those police fellows, are concentrating on this spot. In a quarter of an hour they will be on you, and I particularly do not wish to have been observed in conversation with you. I have already had to undergo insolence and annoyance. Esther—tell me. How came this affair about? Unless you know something about it and had some hand in it

or other—though, as I said, I entirely disbelieve in you having done it—why are you in hiding from the police?'

'I do know about it, and I don't want to say naught.'

'Did your grandfather shoot Physic?'

'You heard,' answered Esther, turning sullen, 'I ain't a-going to say nothing about it. I've took it on myself, and that's enough.'

'Do you mean to tell me you have taken the charge of murder on yourself to screen another?'

Esther moved from foot to foot impatiently and uneasily.

'I won't say nothing. There now. If I gets snared in everything I sez, mere talking wi' you, how'd it be if lawyer fellers were to set on me and worrit me? They'd have it all out in ten minutes.'

'In ten minutes you'll be in the hands of the police, and then the lawyers, if you will, will be on you.'

'Them perlice!' laughed Esther. 'They'll never touch me. Look. I'll climb up a-top o' the Grey Mare. I'll stand there, and let 'em all see me, and come runnin' on up hill and try to ketch me, and just to the last I'll give 'em the slip.'

'But I do not wish to be seen, myself.'

'They shan't see you neither.'

'How will you manage that?'

'Wait and see.' She ascended the rock, and standing

against the grey sky waved her hands and shouted defiantly. Justinian, who was concealed behind the rock, looked out cautiously, and saw that a couple of men were approaching. He was greatly annoyed, alarmed, and incensed; the girl had shown herself, and he must infallibly be seen either where he was, or running away as soon as she fled. She might run faster than her pursuers, but he himself would be recognized, and might get into trouble for having been with her without making an attempt to detain her.

'It's coming!' shouted Esther, looking down on him.

'Confounded bother it is. I wish I'd never concerned myself to bring you the loaf.'

He could hear the call of Tregaskis to Esther to stand and give herself up.

In another moment—suddenly—he, Esther, the rock were wrapped in a moor fog, dense as a pall of cotton wool. Esther sprang off the Grey Mare and came to him.

'There,' said she, 'I told you so. The pisgies—the Good Folk 'd never let them take me. I seed 'n coming. I seed 'n first come ower Brown Willy, then her came along Hendra, and I were sure nigh to a minute when her'd be on us. Now come along wi' me. I'll take you away to where you can get your road home, and I can be off to my place o' hiding. You may walk now bowld as i' the streets of Liskeard, and no one

'll never see you, if they was five paces off.' Esther laughed. 'Do they think to take me on the moor? They'll never do it. They canna do it.'

She walked on with Justinian a little way through the mist, and then stood still.

'Gran'fer cannot come to the Grey Mare wi' bread for me, and I must ha' some'ut to eat. Whativer is to be done? I'll get along with this you've given me a bit. After that I must ha' more, and where is it to be brought to? They're watching gran'fer and gran'mother I reckon. Oh, dear! what shall I do? Now so—I'll tell y' where it is. If I'm wanted, go to the top o' Brown Willy. I trust you—I'll trust no other. If I'm to live—I must have bread; if I gets none—why I reckon I shall starve. But you don't forget what I said. Tell her—I'll die game and say naught.'

She bounded away and was lost in the mist. Justinian found himself by a granite post that he recognized and by a track the direction of which he knew.

CHAPTER XII.

A CONFIDENCE.

Justinian entered Theresa's room, and going over to the fireplace stood with his back to it. She was sitting some way from the hearth, near the middle of the apartment, in her arm-chair, listless, doing nothing. She wore a dark-blue velvet loose dress, with lace frills about the throat and sleeves. Her face was almost as white as the lace, and her eyes as dark as the velvet.

The boy had not seen much of her during the last few days, and he had sufficient observation to note, and sufficient feeling to be startled at, the change in her. The face was thinner, the features sharper, the hue more deathly. All energy and brightness were gone out of her. Percival was by nature sanguine, and he either did not notice what was clear to the boy, or he considered it as of no real import. Not that he did not love his wife, he loved her so much that he would not

allow that she was seriously ill. Love takes one form or other, of exaggerating or of minimizing the danger of the person loved.

Anxiety was wearing out Theresa, as well as actual sickness, or rather the anxiety induced sickness, and then enfeebled her, so that she was unable to shake it off.

She had hoped, when she consented to be Percival's wife, that the struggle for existence was terminated, and that for the remainder of her days she might be able to bask in the sense of security and in assured comforts. No more holding of the door against the wolf that sought to break in, with a knowledge that the slightest relaxation of muscle, abatement of tension of effort, would leave her a prey of the ravening monster. No more struggle against failing powers and the weariness of exhausted endeavour; no more occupation of debatable land with sword and bow, without camp behind on which to fall back. Such had been her expectation when she married. And she had been disappointed in her anticipation. Her position she had acquired was menaced, was precarious, and she had been forced to make an attempt to secure it which had led to a terrible casualty, from the consequences of which she was not safe.

The thoughts of what she had done, vain repinings that she had not acted otherwise, dread of the catastrophe when the

truth was known, uncertainty how to meet it, all wore her, almost paralyzed her. It was not that she cared much what happened to herself. Life had lost all its charms for her. When she was married and came to Curgenven, life had burst into flower, and the future gleamed before her full of tranquil, sunny blessedness. A blight had fallen on her hope. Her only solicitude was for Percival and the family into which she had been taken up. He had been kind to her, he had done what he could for her, he had been a helper out of her distress; and she could not endure the thought that by her means disgrace and trouble should fall on his loved head. She thought and thought, but could see no way out of her embarrassment, no gleam of light on her darkness.

'Step-mother,' said Justinian, 'whom do you suppose I have seen and chatted with?'

She looked up at him, patiently, without inquiry in her eyes or on her lips.

'And I am the bearer to you of a most unintelligible message.'

'To me?' She spoke without tone of interest in her voice.

'Yes; I have actually had a few words with Esther Morideg.'

A sudden flush rose to Theresa's cheeks, and her hands

trembled as she laid them on the arms of her chair and raised herself from her supine position.

'Yes, step-mother, I have. It ought not to have been. There is a warrant out against her, and the police are chivying her like a hare. I dare say it was all wrong. I ought to have stopped and held her till the constables came up; but I'm not the sort of fellow to care to play amateur bobby, so I didn't do it. I was not born to be a policeman, nor have the inclination to become one. The blue-bottles are paid to do their work, let them do it. I don't care what the law may be, I won't stoop to that sort of mean work. The fact was, Alice sent me to the Moridegs to see if I could learn where Esther was, so as to convey a message to her. Alice is a chivalrous little Don Quixote of the feminine gender, and will not believe that Esther is guilty.'

'No, she is not guilty.'

'I know she is not,' pursued Justinian. 'I have evidence that she is innocent, for I saw the pistol in its place when I went for my gun. And I'm glad to hear that you take the same view as Alice and me. I wish the governor did, but he is too impetuous in jumping at conclusions to arrive at right ones. Well, step-mother, I found that the Moridegs were closely watched, and that they were unable to take food to Esther at the place appointed, and so she came herself after

it. Then that impudent monkey Tregaskis and some other fellows gave her chase, and I let them run, I knew Esther could distance them, and old Roger begged me take the loaf for Esther to the Grey Mare, and I did so. I did not exactly want to speak with her. As she is under suspicion, and a warrant out against her, I did not like to seem to help in getting her away, and help of course I did when I took her bread; but then, on the other hand, I couldn't be such a cad as to refuse. Well, Esther threw all those fellows out who were in pursuit and came to the Grey Mare, and I gave her the loaf. I had promised Alice, if possible, to see the girl and give to her Alice's assurance of confidence, and so, of course, having promised, I had to do it. If I made myself amenable to the laws, all I can say is, the laws be blowed.' Justinian straightened his back and looked consequential. 'Then Esther gave me a queer message to you. She said I was to tell you she'd die game and hold her tongue, or something to that effect. But hang me if I can make any sense of it. Why is it she wants you to know that she will not tell?'

Theresa, who had been listening with quivering attention, sank back in her chair, closed her hands, and in a faint voice answered, 'I cannot say.'

'Of course not,' said Justinian, 'nor any one else. But the whole affair is an enigma to me. Why is Esther cutting about

on the moors, half starved, and hiding—goodness only knows where—when there is no occasion? She never shot Physic. He did it himself. His wicked conscience for once spoke; and I'll tell you what, step-mother, the explanation will come soon enough, as soon as ever his affairs are looked into. It will be discovered that he has been making away with some of the moneys for which he was accountable. I dare be sworn that he has taken handfuls of Curgenven rents and has poured them into his own pocket. The boss never looks into accounts, he takes all on trust. And what Physic has done to my father he has done to others. I should not be surprised if Sir Sampson had frightened him. There was some talk at Cartuthers about Physic and his accounts, and Sir Sampson said he was going to take his affairs out of Physic's hands now that Physic had taken to mining speculations. He advised the governor to do the same. Well, my theory of this business is that old Physic found his iniquities were coming to light, and afraid of conviction and transportation, he took a dose of lead. Why, step-mother, I've heard the gardener say he saw Physic come this way, and go towards the bungalow not an hour—hardly above half-an-hour before he shot himself. That is the explanation. He came here, found no one in, went to the bungalow, took the pistol, and he had so much gentility in him as not to shoot himself on our grounds, but out on the

moor. Mark my words—that is the true story, and all these owls of police, and magistrates, and my father, and every one else will come round in the end to my opinion. Those fellows never see further than the extremity of their noses. I don't mean the governor—he is led by the rest; I mean Tregaskis and idiots of his calibre—and they are cheeky too.'

'Do you think they will not take Esther?' Theresa half rose in her chair. She had put together her hands—thin white hands they were—she opened them, and then clasped them again to conceal their vibration.

'How can I tell? Not whilst they have such unintelligent fellows as Tregaskis after her. But she cannot go on for ever hiding. The moors don't stretch out into infinity, nor can she go on to eternity without food. How anything is to be conveyed to her, I do not know. Her grandparents dare not venture to carry bread to her, and the Grey Mare is now blown upon. I don't mind telling you that *I* know the whereabouts of her hiding-place, but old Roger can't take food there, or all those blue-bottles will be after him like what they are—blue-bottles.'

'She must have something taken to her.'

'I don't see it. If she is innocent, let her surrender. No harm can come of it. It's all moonshine and nonsense. She is frightened, because she is half a savage, and does not want

to be locked up for a bit; she is afraid of that, just as any wild bird would be afraid of a cage, and hate the notion of being clapped into one. But, bless you, it's only for a night or two; I could get her out like a shot with the evidence I could produce in the court. If I had had time at the Grey Mare, I'd have told her so.'

'Oh, Justin, do see that she has what she needs.'

'That is all very fine. I'm to carry her crumbs, but I want to know why? If she's innocent, let her come forward and trust to me to get her off.'

'There may be more behind—something she does not wish to say.'

'I don't believe it. What can there be behind? I have told you I know exactly how it all came about. She may possibly have seen old Physic kill himself, and she, in her ignorance, supposes that this may compromise her—that is all.'

'She must be helped. She cannot remain in hiding for always.'

'Let her come out and clear herself, I say.'

Theresa's heart beat rapidly. She could no longer endure the burden of her secret, no longer bear to have no one whom she could consult, and who might assist her in her difficulties. She dared not confide the truth to her husband. It was from him, above all, that she desired it should be kept concealed.

She had tried the rector in a much lighter matter, and he had proved his reluctance to help her. She had no one else to whom she could put out her hand but this boy, who, with his self-assurance, his energy, and his sound heart, could serve her in her need. She made an attempt to stand up, but her strength was not equal to the effort.

'Shall I assist you, step-mother?'

Justinian came to her and took her by both hands, and she rose to her feet. Something of her former vigour revived in her.

'Justin,' said she, 'I must say to you what I could not say to another. I did it!'

'Did what?'

'I shot Physic!'

He let go her hands and sprang back with an exclamation of horror.

'It is true. I did not intend to do it. It was an accident. But for all that—I did it.'

Justinian stared at her, speechless in his dismay.

'Esther saw what took place, and she has run away, mainly that she may not have to appear in evidence against me. I would not have your dear, dear father know this for worlds. Now you understand what was meant by the message of Esther to me. She is a faithful girl, infinitely grateful for the little

kindness I have shown her. I assure you—I do assure you—it was an accident.'

Justinian was still too shocked to speak.

'I can bear the sense of what I have done no longer without speaking, and I want your help. Esther must be got away. Should she be taken, then I must tell all, and there is something behind I do not wish to tell, something that would greatly affect all your prospects. There is but one hope—that Esther may be got away. Then the matter can remain unexposed. Do not ask for more information. Let it suffice that I did it, that Esther is screening me, and that for your father's sake, for the sake of the Curgenven family, the real truth must be concealed.'

Justinian had recovered himself by this time; he took a turn up and down the room, then went to the window and looked out. The day had closed in rain, in cloud and rain intermingled, that gave prospect of continuance for some days.

'I see,' said he. 'If you put the matter in my hands, I'll manage it. Of course she must be given the means of getting away. Have you any money?'

'Yes—a few pounds.'

'That will do to begin with. I will see her; I must go where she is to be found, and take her something to eat, and I'll manage somehow. I think I might contrive to get her off

to the Sandwich Islands. I'll turn it over in my head; don't concern yourself about it. I am glad you did not apply to my father, he'd have lost his head over it at once. The only point to be really considered is which of the Sandwich Islands to send her to. I forget in which the volcano is, of course she must not go to that. She will be in her element there—all savages together. What is the name of the volcano? Kea-Roa?—I forget. I'll ask Alice.'

CHAPTER XIII.

CAPTURED.

JUSTINIAN did not go in quest of Esther the day that ensued for two reasons. In the first place, it was a day of incessant heavy rain. In the next, his project of sending the girl to the Sandwich Islands, on riper consideration, did not appear feasible.

The young fellow, after he had recovered the consternation into which he was cast by learning that his step-mother was the actual person who had shot Physic—and this recovery was not a long, protracted affair—was not dissatisfied at having a heavy responsibility laid on him. As he put it to himself, his step-mother had done the wisest thing possible in trusting him with the secret, as no one else in the world was so capable as himself of helping her out of her difficulties.

Dashed at first in his self-assurance at finding that his admirably elaborated explanation of the mystery of the death

of Physic was groundless, he speedily recovered his self-confidence in the gratification of knowing that he alone was in the possession of the facts, and that placed him in a position of superiority to magistrates and police and the public in general.

After having cudgelled his brains as to the best method of disposing of Esther where she might be secure from pursuit, he remembered a boy acquaintance—the son of the parson at Clovelly in North Devon, and he wrote him a characteristic letter :—

'Dear Bob,—I want you to do me a favour. There is a girl who can climb, like a goat, anywhere, and I want her to collect birds' eggs for me at Lundy. You knew I was making a collection four years ago, when you were at the grammar school at Liskeard. Well, Doctor Jenkins, you know, promised me his collection, and he gave it me. There were a lot of awfully jolly sea-birds' eggs in it. Well, he did a thing of which I don't approve. Five days after, he took it back, and gave it to another chap—that little sneak Williams, you remember him. I think I behaved like a gentleman in that I did not shake the box and break all the eggs before I gave it up ; but then I am a gentleman, you know. The Curgenvens always are that, if nothing else. As to young Williams, he is

a cad. He never gave me one of the eggs. For one thing, I would not have taken any had he offered them. The school has gone down awfully since that affair of the eggs. And now I hear it is not thought anything of except by the shoppies, who send their cubs to it. That affair disgusted me rather with egg collecting. But I am going to begin at it again. They are starting a museum at Liskeard, and I fancy it is the thing for us Curgenvens to be the principal benefactors and patrons, so I shall give it my collection of birds' eggs when I have got one, and for that reason I want a lot from Lundy Isle. I have considered and send you a sort of a wild girl, and I want you to put her across to Lundy Isle, and leave her there as long as she thinks necessary in order to collect birds' eggs for me. I have a pair of guillemots, but I want more, and they of all sorts. This girl will go anywhere over the cliffs. I shall send her across country. My notion is to drive her part of the way, and then let her work along as best she can. I shall provide her with enough money to pay expenses. Don't say anything about this to any one. I particularly want it to be kept secret. I don't want it to come to the ears of any one in Liskeard, that they may be thrown off their balance when they learn as a surprise the munificent benefaction. So, dear Bob, mind and do what I ask you for the sake of old times, and get that girl put across at once to

Lundy Isle, and leave her there, birds'-nesting, till I tell you she may be shipped back again.

'*Vale*, old chap.'

Justinian dispatched this letter, and congratulated himself on having formed so plausible an excuse for sending the girl to Lundy, without having been obliged to state anything that was not strictly true.

The second day was as rainy as that preceding it. The skies were blurred over with formless cloud. The wind was in the south-west. The leaves turned up their lower sides to the wind; rills formed by the side of the gravel walks and washed the gravel away, pools stood on the terrace. A hateful day to be out, thought Justinian; but then, with compunction, he considered how doubly hateful it must be to the poor girl on the moor, crouching in some wretched place of concealment, exposed to the drive of the rain and the rush of the wind. At lunch, when he ate his cutlet and mashed potatoes, and drank his glass of claret, his conscience stung him, that he was pampered whilst she was starving—she had had but one loaf, and that must by this time be consumed.

What should he do? Would he find Esther if he went in quest of her? But was he justified in delaying the execution of his design? Was not this detestable weather the very

best for his purpose? Those owls of police, as Justinian said to himself, would never wet their shins on such a day as that, hunting up the unfortunate Esther on the moors, exposed to the worst of the weather. When he had sat for some time brooding in the smoking-room with his father, answering the remarks of the latter shortly, and looking into the fire, he said suddenly: 'Governor! I don't fancy you have any idea how ill step-mother is. You take it all ghastly easy, but I believe she is wasting away. Every day she looks worse. I don't like it at all. That old humbug, the Liskeard doctor, is not enough; if I were you I'd send to Plymouth. Indeed, I wish you would do it for my sake, for *I* am uneasy about her. She is a different-looking woman altogether from what she was when she first came here.'

'You don't mean to say so!' said Percival Curgenven, starting up. 'I'll drive into Liskeard and telegraph at once. Why did you not tell me this before?'

'Why, governor, you have eyes as well as I.'

'I'll go at once.'

He rang the bell; and when the servant answered—'Tell George to get the dog-cart ready at once. He is to accompany me to Liskeard,' said Percival.

'And,' added Justinian, 'tell James to have my cob put into the cart—also at once.'

'Where are you going, Justin?'

'After birds' eggs—anywhere. I won't stick in any longer on such a day as this.'

'Then come with me.'

'I can't, governor; I want particularly to go somewhere else.'

It was not a gracious speech. He felt it was not, so he altered his tone and said, 'The fact is I have written to Bob Rawley about some eggs, and there's a matter connected with my letter I must attend to.'

'Shall you take James with you?'

'No; I shall go alone.'

'Well, I'll go up-stairs and see your step-mother. By Jove, I'd no notion she was so bad. I don't know what I should do were——' His voice trembled, and he ran out of the room to conceal his emotion.

Justinian then got the housekeeper to put together some food, and had difficulty in framing a reason. She brought a small package of sandwiches. That, of course, would not suffice. He must have double, three times the amount. Should she put him up a flask of sherry? Yes; and a loaf of bread and some cheese—cake also. He might want it or might not. Wasn't sure he should come back that night. Anyhow, no harm done if there were too much food—he could chuck it away, or give it to some who needed it. Justinian was

accustomed to be open in all he did, and he was clumsy over his excuses. He had much better have made none—simply given his orders and no explanation with them. But this did not occur to him till he had bungled at putting his demands in a plausible form.

Then he wrapped himself in a waterproof and drove away. He had a long journey before him. He must skirt the moors on their western flank, and, when he reached the main artery of traffic with West Cornwall, either follow it over the Bodmin moors to an inn called the Jamaica Tavern, leave his trap there, and thence strike north over the waste, or else still skirt the moors till he reached the watershed between the Atlantic and the English Channel, put his horse in at a farm, and thence strike west. He was doubtful which course to take, and had not made up his mind when, with steaming cob and himself in a soaked condition, his waterproof notwithstanding, he drew up at a little hostelry called Five Lanes, where he reached the main road, and where the decision must be taken.

To his infinite annoyance, he saw in the doorway the face of the policeman Tregaskis, who, however, at once dived into the kitchen of the tavern, and Justinian trusted that he had not been recognized. 'If he has seen me,' said the young fellow, 'he is too big an ass to draw any conclusions from it.'

He had turned the cob to the door, but now, instead of halting to give it a mouthful of corn, he impatiently whipped the brute, turned away from the inn, and drove down the steep lane leading from the main road to the village of Altarnun. He elected to take this way, as that in which he was least likely to be observed on leaving the door of the Five Lanes Inn. 'That's how the public money is spent,' growled Justinian. 'That police fellow goes loafing about and looking in wherever there is a pretty girl, and sits and toasts himself by the fire, ogling her and talking soft-sawder. And we have to pay for it all. It is too disgusting! I wish I were a magistrate. I'd make them caper, like the old fellow on hot plates in *Sandford and Merton*. But I shall be some day, and then let them look out—that's all.' He lashed the cob as though it were a policeman he were stinging to his duty.

The road was narrow, and was an almost continuous ascent for three miles. The cob must walk; all collar work, no trotting ground.

'If it had not been for that pig Tregaskis, I'd have walked,' grumbled Justinian, 'and done it in half the time. A horse is about the slowest of any living creatures, after a slug, when walking. Why should that fellow have gone to Five Lanes?—and just now. I don't suppose he spends three-farthings for the good of the house. Had I put in there, it would have been

half-a-crown into Mrs. Bone's pocket. Now she's half-a-crown short, and all along of that bobby.'

Justinian was not in a good humour. The wet had spoiled whatever amiability had been in him when he started. The waterproof had served to conduct all the rain that fell on his hat and back down to the cushion and had saturated that, so that he was sitting on a sodden sponge. Moreover, he was facing the driving rain, and the driving rain penetrated up his sleeves, and went in under his chin, soaked his shirt and sopped his collar.

He had resolved what to do. He would take Esther, if he found her, and drive her across country to Bude, see that she was settled in somewhere there, and arrange for her to go on by the coach next day to Clovelly.

If he did that he could not get home the same day, that was not possible. The cob could not stand such a stretch in wet weather.

'It will be disgustingly compromising, hang it! Good gracious! what would the boss say if he heard of it?—or the police? Hang it! I wish I were well out of it, but I can't help myself. I've undertaken the job, and I must go through with it. I'll put up at Trevillian's Gate; there is a farm there, and I know the old chap. He'll give the cob a feed and wipe down, and I'll make Esther walk along the road, and pick her up, so

that they won't see us start together in the direction of Bude, which might astonish their minds.'

He arrived at Trevillian's Gate, and got the farmer to attend to the horse. Then he started off over the downs in the direction of Brown Willy. This mountain stood behind another, a bolder ridge—Rough Tor—and this had to be ascended or circumvented before the object of his journey was attained. The farmer was not a little surprised at the young gentleman coming there and starting thence, on such a day, for a moor ramble. He asked a number of questions—wanted to know Justinian's purpose, the point to which he was going, how long he would be away, what were the contents of his package, whether his society as a companion would be acceptable; if not, whether his boy had not better accompany Justinian, to guide him in the event of his being unable to find his way, or, having reached his destination, was unable to find his way back. He entered into minute particulars as to what bogs were to be avoided and what watercourses crossed, and which landmarks observed in the event of Justinian desiring to go in such a direction, and which in the event of his purposing to take another.

Justinian was exasperated and perplexed. He was forced to decline well-meant offers, and to evade pointed questions. He was detained longer than he liked, as he had some miles

to walk and to return, and before him, should he bring Esther with him, was a long drive in the dark through intricate lanes.

He knew his direction pretty well. Rough Tor loomed before him in the rain, wreathed in cloud. He was sufficiently versed in moor wanderings to be aware that he must keep to high ground, and he had shot snipe over the bogs in the bottoms in winter and knew where they lay, and which were dangerous.

'Confound these country bumpkins!' muttered the lad as he went along, 'they are as inquisitive as women. They see so few folk, that the arrival of a visitor is to them as welcome as an orange to a child—both to be sucked dry.'

On reaching the first elevation he looked about him. Through the rain and drifting cloud he distinguished figures, but could not make out whether of cattle or men, at some distance on the moor in his rear. 'I do not remember passing any beasts,' he said. 'I suppose horses—can't keep themselves dry this weather, poor devils, going from place to place in quest of shelter, and finding none.' Hugging his bundle of bread and sandwiches, he ran down the further side of the hill.

After a long and weariful trudge, and none is more weariful than where the feet sink at every step in oozy soil, and the knees are beaten by wet branches of heather,

Justinian reached the foot of Brown Willy and began the ascent. The whole of the summit was wrapped in whirling masses of white vapour, cloud driven up from the ocean and caught there. It was like a huge mass of scoria smoking with internal fire, or would have been so, had it given off the least heat. Justinian set his face determinately at the hill, and began the steep scramble among hummocks of furze and turf, through boggy patches where the moisture that condensed on the mountain had broken out and spread over its flanks, scrambled among a chaos of tumbled granite blocks like moraines of glaciers, then over short turf, slippery as glass with the wet. He was speedily enveloped in the cloud, and then could not see many feet before him. He could not, however, miss his way; he had but to climb straight before him till he reached the summit.

'And when I get to the top—the highest point in this howling desolation—what then?' asked Justinian. 'Who is to see me? If I shout, who is to hear me? It will be a confounded nuisance if I have had to come all this way, and been exposed to all this weather, in a wild-goose chase. However, I have undertaken the job, and so must carry it out.'

Up among the crags, in and out among the slippery, fallen stones, stumbling, catching at bushes, panting, hot and cold at

once, inhaling fog dense as smoke and smelling of the sea, Justinian toiled on. Now his parcel fell from him, and would have bounded down the mountain side but that it was happily arrested by a cluster of stones a few feet below.

'By Jove! here I am!' exclaimed Justinian. 'Here is old King Cole's mausoleum.' He referred in this flippant manner to the great cairn on the highest horn of Brown Willy.

'Now I am here—what next?'

He seated himself on the cairn. He might have been on a fragment of a ruined world, drifting in space. Above, around, below, was only dense fog sweeping along before the wind, not now condensed into rain, but thick, palpable, obscuring every object within a yard. There might have been no world below. As the vapour drove by, it was as though the cairn itself were swimming, were rushing along, and parting the milky nebulous sea, and leaving it in streamers in its wake. The granite stones of which the great pile was constructed were black with lichen, like reindeer moss, but with white antler-like moss springing up in the interstices. For a moment Justinian thought of the old king in the heart of this cairn, and how he was drawing water of heaven into his golden cup.

'Here is a pretty go,' said Justinian. 'Up in the clouds and without a prospect of achieving what I came for.'

He had hardly muttered the words before he heard a shout; a strange call, that startled him, and made him spring to his feet and step down the side of the cairn. It was as though the buried Cornish king were calling to him from his sepulchre.

His heart beat a little faster.

'Hang it! what can that have been? Not Esther.'

Again the voice—a hoarse, strange voice; not a mere cry, but a jabber of confused words.

'It's not human; I swear this is uncomfortable,' said Justinian, with contempt for the fears that nevertheless prompted him to leave the cairn. He had not descended below the heap of granite stones before he heard the voice again, this time nearer. It issued from some masses of rock thrown together in confusion below.

He cautiously descended towards this accumulation of stones, and became aware that there was some sort of arrangement in the blocks.

He approached, not without caution, partly because of the rapid descent of the mountain side and the slippery condition of the turf, but partly also from uncertainty as to who or what was the inmate of this cave, or whatever it might be.

'There's a sort of door—a something over it,' said the young fellow. He stooped to his knee. A door there was of two

upright granite jambs, with a lintel of the same material thrown across, not more than two feet six inches above the soil. He put his hand through to draw back what seemed a mat, but let it fall again as a cry like that of a wild beast issued from the chamber into which for a moment he had looked. He was resolved now to search out the mystery, and again he thrust in his arm, held back the curtain, and looked within.

He saw a heap of heather, and on this heap, tossing, a figure. In the light that entered by the opening, he distinguished the white gleaming arms as they were flung about, a face and flashing eyes.

'I'll die game—I wi'n't speak a word—I swear it!'

'Good heavens! Esther! Esther!—is that you? Esther, I say—speak!'

At that moment, out of the mist dashed three men, and ran in upon Justinian.

'Thank you, sir. Thank you kindly for leading us to her. Now we've caught her, that's fine!'

Tregaskis spoke, and with him were two other constables.

'You fool!' said Justinian, angrily, 'do you see—she is either mad or ill.'

CHAPTER XIV.

THROWING UP THE BALL.

With difficulty Esther Morideg was drawn out of the beehive hut in which she had taken refuge. Her clothes were soaked, she was in a fever, and delirious. The wet, the exposure, the cold, hunger, had driven her temporarily from her senses.

Tregaskis, constable though he was, treated the poor girl with great kindness, spoke gently, caressingly to her, told her not to be frightened; that he and the others would get her to a house where she would be put into a warm bed, and made comfortable. She did not heed him. She seized Justinian by the arm, and drew him to her, and muttered hoarsely, 'I'll die game. Tell her so. I'll not speak a word.'

'I have a flask of sherry with me,' said the boy. 'Let her have some—she must be starving.'

'She is in a fever,' said Tregaskis. 'Now, sir, we must

carry her, or get her to walk between us all the way, or will you run on to Trevillian's gate and bring your cart over the down to under Rough Tor? I think it can be got so far.'

'I'll do it,' said Justinian.

'And—look here, sir! We'll just be so bold as to borrow the cart of you to take her anyways as far as to Five Lanes. She can't be brought on foot that distance. Very considerate of you, sir, to bring the trap for us.'

'I will do what I can,' said Justinian, biting his lips. 'Of course, there is but one thing now to be done—to see that she be cared for, and have the doctor to her. She is very ill.'

He hurried away down the mountain side. He was angry with himself, angry with Tregaskis. Instead of being the means of helping Esther to escape from the moors, he had, like a fool—he said that to himself—led the police to where she was concealed, and he was the only person who could have done so, for no one else had a notion where she was.

But after the first ebullition of vexation at his mismanagement of the commission given him, he recovered. The girl was seriously ill. What could he have done, had he found her in this condition without some one at his back to assist him? What, under the circumstances, could have been done save remove her to a place where she would be attended to? He could not have allowed her to remain in her cell on the

mountain top, among the clouds, there to die in fever and delirium. He must have gone in quest of assistance, and assistance brought there meant the revelation of her place of retreat, her removal, and consignment to the custody of the police. After all considered and said, what had happened was perhaps the best thing that could have happened. What would have been the fate of the poor girl but for him? How could her life have been preserved but for him? How would the police have found her but for him? On all sides a debt of obligation was due to him. So he held up his head once more, and felt that he was a person of importance.

The sick girl was brought to Five Lanes, and Justinian insisted on Tregaskis taking her in his trap; he would hire another, and one far less convenient, at the inn for himself. So he was left behind, and the constable with his charge, and another policeman, went on towards Curgenven. He, Justinian, waited till a clumsy horse was put into a still more clumsy two-wheeled conveyance, and in this he was driven at a slow jog towards his home.

'After all,' growled Justinian, 'that precious noodle, Tregaskis, has brought to Mrs. Bone, of Five Lanes, more than the half-crown I calculated on spending there. I shall have to give seven-and-six, and a bob to the driver, for this beastly trap.'

The son of the landlady at Five Lanes drove him, but Justinian was in no humour for conversation. Not only was he wet and chilled after the walk and after having become hot in the scramble, but the temporary elation, that had followed on his depression at having been the vehicle for the discovery and arrest of Esther, passed off, and he began to realize for the first time in his life that he had played a sorry figure—that in the first place he had made a fool of himself in giving occasion of talk relative to himself and Esther, to such an extent as to have led Tregaskis to watch him, with the conviction that through him the whereabouts of the girl might be discovered.

In the next place, it was a humiliation to his self-esteem to feel that he had been outwitted by the 'owl,' the 'idiot,' the 'jackass' whom he had treated with such impertinence, and to know that he had placed himself at this man's mercy. Tregaskis could, if he chose, make the matter unpleasant not for him only, but also for his father. It would indeed be a scandal if it became public that he, the son of a justice of the peace, had been aiding Esther to evade capture on a warrant issued by his own father.

A bitter medicine is the humiliation of self-esteem, and the more bitter the greater the self-esteem is. Justinian had not valued himself, his abilities, his position, at a low figure, and

the consciousness of his having blundered egregiously was to him now as wormwood.

But conceited though he was, his nature was healthy and his heart right, and by the time he had reached Curgenven he had resolved on what he would do. Instead of going directly home, he drove to the constabulary residence, and there dismissed the trap. In the cottage lived Tregaskis with his sister, considerably older than himself, who kept house for him. Justinian entered, and was told that Esther was being cared for by Miss Tregaskis, a clean, kind-hearted, energetic, and sensible woman, and that the doctor had been summoned and was momentarily expected.

'Look here, constable,' said Justinian, 'I'll tell you what I have come for, not only to ask after the poor girl, but to beg your pardon. I've not behaved right to you. Now, if you choose, you can make it hot for me. However, let no considerations one way or the other influence you, do what is your duty. If you think it well to say that because there had been some silly chatter about me and Esther, you watched me so as to discover her retreat, you are welcome. I know she is innocent. I have evidence that will at once clear her. Knowing that, I went to find her. I could not account for her running away. As for the chatter, it is not well-founded. Miss Alice, my cousin, and I have both pitied and liked the

girl, so has my step-mother, and when all the rest of the world went against her, we rather held to her, and believed in her. I don't want any sort of nasty gossip to grow out of this, there has been enough of idle talk already; it will deepen into something worse if it comes out that you followed me in order to find where she hid. As far as I am concerned, if I have given occasion for such talk, I must bear it, but it will injure *her*. And it will trouble my dear father exceedingly. There you have it in a nutshell. If you can, without breach of duty, spare us, I shall be for ever grateful to you; if you can't, well, I must bear it, and so must my father, who will, I suppose, resign his magistracy. But, first of all, consider what is your duty, and do that. As for the past, and my impertinence to you, an officer under the Queen, I heartily, unreservedly say—I am sorry, and ask your forgiveness. There's my hand.'

Tregaskis saluted, he was too modest to accept the proffered hand of the young squire, but he said:

'Sir, Mr. Justinian, I am touched. You may rely on me. I will not say a word beyond what I am obliged. I am heartily rejoiced to hear that you can clear Esther Morideg. I, myself, have had my doubts about her guilt, for I have learned that the lodge-keeper saw Mr. Physic go towards the Hall only twenty minutes or half-an-hour before he was proved dead,

and the gardener saw him near the bungalow. Besides, the butler says he called at the house to inquire after Mrs. Curgenven. All which points to suicide rather than murder.'

'Then I can swear,' said Justinian, 'that the pistol was in its place on the rack an hour before, as I was in the smoking-room of the bungalow after my gun, and saw it there. So that, unless Esther were seen going to the bungalow within that hour, the case against her falls to the ground; and unless the bench be as great owls as coroner and jury, they will see that, and dismiss the case against Esther.'

'There are difficulties still—what she said to the dowager Mrs. Curgenven. But I dare say the girl saw what took place, and was frightened, and ran away, thinking that in some fashion the seeing Mr. Physic shoot himself would bring her to trouble. Can't say—it may be so. But as to yourself, sir, I'll not say anything I needn't say, not only for your own sake, but for hers. Poor maid, she's suffered enough already, and is now terrible off her head. I reckon she must have been days and nights in soaking clothes, without fire or food. She's got a rare constitution, but it would want that of a rhinoceros to pull through such contraries as she has undergone.'

Justinian walked off. 'Tregaskis is not such a bad fellow

as I thought him,' he commented, 'nor quite such a fool as I supposed; he'll get on in his profession. I'll speak to the governor to give him a leg up.'

On reaching home the hour was late, past the dinner-hour, but his father was not below. The butler told Justinian that Mr. Curgenven was up-stairs with the doctor from Plymouth. The boy hastily dressed, glad to relieve himself of his sopping clothes, and then ran down again, to find his father with the doctor descending the great staircase.

'Above all,' said the latter, 'she must not be agitated. Any shock, any strain might be fatal. I don't say she may not pull through—but you must be careful. Mind this—the best doctor, the best nurse, are absence from anxiety and from worry; negative nurse and negative doctor, but keep her amused.'

Justinian could say nothing to his father at dinner, the medical man was there, and in a hurry, as he had to catch a train, but he saw that his father's face was grave, his mind abstracted, so that he either did not hear or found no humour in the doctor's jokes.

When the latter was gone, Justinian went to his father, took his hand and said, 'Governor, is she very bad?'

Percival pressed his son's hand and his lip quivered, he could not speak.

'May I go and see her to-night, gov.?'

At that moment the door opened, and the servant who was acting as nurse came in, and said that her mistress was very anxious to see Mr. Justinian, if he were returned.

'Go, old boy,' said Percival. 'It will fidget her if she does not see you. I say,' he drew his son to his side, 'you won't mind, will you, giving her a kiss? she will value it. She hasn't but me who cares a snap for her, I mean. She will be pleased, you know, and perhaps you mayn't have many chances.' He stopped for a moment, and gulped something down. 'Justin, she does like you. Now don't excite her, be very quiet. But if you could kiss her, it would be better than a sleeping-draught. I know it would give her so much pleasure. I don't know what I shall do—but go along, don't keep her waiting.'

On entering his step-mother's room, Justinian saw her sitting where he had left her many hours before, in the same attitude, the same picture of mute despair, a small dark figure in the large room decorated with light curtains and paper, her dark hair shining doubly dark against her white face and throat. He was touched, and stepping over to her, stood behind the chair, leaned forward, took her head between his hands, and kissed it.

A flush of colour rose into her pale cheeks, and a light smile formed on her lips.

'Dear mother—dear, dear mother,' he said, fondling her thin white fingers, 'you must get well, you must do so for my father's sake and mine. The governor is in a dreadful take-on about you. 'Pon my word, I don't know what he would do without you. There—you really will make an effort to shake this off. It's only a good lusty effort is needed to make the dad and me happy again.'

'Dear Justin,' said Theresa, 'I would do anything for him —anything I could—and for you. I love you both. I have no one else to love. But now tell me, what have you done?'

'I must not excite you. That old codger, Tonks, said so.'

'I shall be far more excited if I do not know what has taken place. I shall fret and work myself into a fever.'

'Oh, my dear mother, you are too cold and white to get into a fever through any amount of excitement. I have just seen fever, what it really is, and you might as well talk of scrambling up Salisbury steeple as of getting into a fever.'

'I really must know.'

'And I really do not think I ought to tell you.'

She looked steadily at him out of her great dark eyes.

'Indeed, Justin, it would kill me to be left in suspense.'

He seated himself, as he had done once before, at the time when they had made peace, on a stool by her side, looking up into her face.

'Hang it! I don't know what to do. I've gone boggling about doing the wrong things all day, and chaps I've turned up my nose at have had twice as much wits as myself. And now, here am I—I heard old Tonks say you were not to be agitated, that it was as much as your life was worth to be excited, that you must be left in the most complete repose.'

'But I cannot repose; I shall not sleep a wink till I know all. Where is Esther?'

'Must I say?' The boy looked at her disconsolately. 'If I do you harm, I shall never know an hour's peace. My dear mother, I have such a pain in my heart now because you are ill. I cannot endure more, indeed I cannot.'

'You have bad tidings, and fear to tell me. Tell me all, or I shall imagine something far worse than the reality.'

'Well, if it must be. Esther is in the hands of the police.'

Theresa dropped her hands on her lap, and looking dreamily before her said, 'I thought it would come to that in time.'

'She is in high fever. The poor girl has suffered dreadful

exposure, and has undergone great privation. When she was found, she was delirious, and she is so still.'

'She did all in her power for me. I will not desert her.'

Theresa spoke in a tone of weariness and resignation.

'You know,' said Justinian, 'there is no reason why all should come out, if you don't wish it; and, of course, it is better it should not. It is only to trail a red herring across the path, and the police will go after it like a pack of hounds.'

'It must all come to light now,' said Theresa. 'I fought against it as long as I could, but it is over—I mean fighting. I have not the strength. It must all come out.'

She spoke calmly.

'I say, I hope this won't upset you, and prevent your sleeping to-night.'

'No, I had made up my mind for it. I knew it must come. I have felt it here'—she touched her heart—'a sort of something here that told me to—to throw up the ball.'

'I am so glad you are not agitated.'

'No. I am past that. I should have been agitated unless I had been told all. Now, it is as well as it is. You will see Esther, tell her——'

'She is not in her senses.'

'Yes, I remember, you said so. When she is herself again,

assure her that she shall get into no further trouble. I will tell all.'

'But there is really no necessity.'

With a faint smile Theresa said, 'There is no more game after the ball is thrown up. I throw up the ball.'

'Esther keeps on repeating that she will be silent. That is what her heated brain holds to.'

'More reason why I should speak. Justin, dear'—she put her hand out to him and he clasped it—'Justin, dear, it is to me an infinite comfort that you have got over your prejudices against me, and that you like me. You will never believe I did this thing intentionally. I did it without knowing what I did, and I was fighting your battle and your dear father's, though you were both unaware of it. You will find that out now. To-morrow, it is too late now, to-morrow morning let the rector and Mrs. Jane come here. I want to see them all, and tell all before them and your father and you. You will go for them?'

'If I must.'

'I wish it. And now—good-night. Kiss me once again, Justin, it does me good.'

CHAPTER XV.

THE END OF THE WILL.

At breakfast next morning Justinian asked his father how the patient was.

'She has had a quiet night; she is getting up now, and told me to remind you to bring old Pamphlet and Jane. What she wants with Jane, I can't think; about the last person I'd like to see. And Jane is not the person to come here, unless to gloat over Theresa's illness.'

It was unusual for Percival to speak harshly of any one, but he made an exception relative to Jane Curgenven. When he did say sharp things, it was with a jaunty, good-humoured air, that showed those who heard him that he did not mean what his words implied; but it was otherwise now. His tone was full of bitterness as he referred to the dowager Mrs. Curgenven.

'I believe that woman, if my dear wife were dying, would'

—Percival tore the toast he held in his hands to pieces, and ground his heel into the floor—'no, Justin, I won't speak of her. She makes my blood boil. She is one of your self-righteous people who believe no one can be a good Christian and respectable who does not hector and lecture the poor, take a class at Sunday-school, and believe in missionaries. Justin, I've knocked a good deal about the world, and for narrowness, spitefulness, lack of charity, commend me to your professional angels.'

Percival's hand quivered with anger. He said more in his wrath than he really felt when cool, just as sometimes in his jokes he gave vent to sentiments he did not seriously entertain.

'Justin, in the Arctic regions the Esquimaux wear a sort of wooden spectacle, with a tiny slit in each eye-piece, and they see nothing but what comes just within the radius of this slit, and that they see only for harpooning purposes. It is so with creatures of the Jane Curgenven type.' He thrust away his plate. 'I've lost my appetite. I have done breakfast.'

'Please, sir, a gentleman wants to see you.' The butler spoke, standing in the door.

'Who is it?'

'I think, sir, it is the young Mr. Physic.'

'Oh! show him into the study. Stay—no—show him in here, he must have ridden or driven over, and may like a snack.'

In another moment a youth was introduced, dressed in mourning, but in mourning of the most groom-like cut—short coat, tight breeches buttoned down over the calves, a black silk tie, with a horseshoe pin in it.

'How do, sir,' said young Physic. 'Come early, I know. Heaps of business since my poor uncle's affair. Awful affair his. Amount of business to me overwhelming. I'm not used to it.'

'Are you going on with his business?'

'I! Lawk, no! Haven't the head for it. Never took to an office. My uncle at one time did offer me a place at his desk, but kicked me out before the fortnight was well over. Sell his business. Hope I shall get an offer. Anyhow, I'm clearing out, that's why I came over. Here's something I've jumped on I s'pose concerns you. Here you are.' He fumbled in his breast-pocket and pulled out a long envelope.

'Mr. Physic, you must have had a long drive or ride.'

'I rode.'

'Then surely you will be glad of a little refreshment. We are rather late at breakfast to-day. My poor wife is very unwell, and it has upset our arrangements.'

'Thanks, I'll peck a bit.' Mr. Physic drew a chair to the table.

'I say, I found that paper there in my uncle's desk. It has "Curgenven" on it. Will, or something of the sort. I don't want it, you may have it. I suppose it belongs to you. I know nothing about these sort of things. I'm clearing out; as soon as decent I'm going to marry, and set up here—I mean at Liskeard. Livery stables is my notion. Pot a lot of money that way and enjoy life. That's the straight tip, eh?'

'Why, preserve me! This is a will—it is dear old Lambert's will!' exclaimed Percival.

'I dare say it is. S'pose so. Looks like it; smells like it. I hate all your legal papers, make me sick. Give me a stable, that's your true home for a man of taste.'

'Why, murder!' exclaimed Percival. 'It is the very will old Fizz—I beg pardon, I mean Mr. Physic—flourished with, and thought with it to scare me and my poor wife.'

'Ah! I'm glad you like it. Thought 'twas something in your way,' said the heir of Physic. 'Now, I'll trouble you—let me see, Mr. Justinian, you cater—to a kidney, and some of the toast under. To my mind, there ain't nothing as'll beat toast under kidney, well saturated and hot.'

'I'm afraid this is not quite hot,' said Justinian.

'Never mind; it would be better hot, but it's good as it is. I'll thank you for the potato chips, they look scrumptious.'

'Justin!' said Percival, 'run with all your legs to the rectory and fetch the venerable Pam and Jane. They must see this, and, by George! we shall have to put heads together and consider what is to be done. I'll attend to Mr. Physic.'

'You haven't,' said Mr. Physic, 'just a nip of something warmer than that chilled coffee, have you? I've had a long ride.'

'I think I can serve you,' said Percival. 'By Jove! this is a perplexing affair. I don't know what to say to it, and which way to take it. I don't even know whether the will is a genuine article, or got up just to scare, like a turnip-head with a candle inside. Run along, Justin. 'Pon my word, I've a great mind to tell Theresa. It might interest her, and she's awfully dull up there in her room. It can't excite her harmfully, and it might be a stimulant to her jaded interest. I'm shot if I won't try it. Tonks said she was to be kept amused. You will help yourself, and excuse me, Mr. Physic.'

'Certainly, certainly, sir; make yourself quite at home with me. I never stand on ceremony myself, in my little box.' Percival went up-stairs.

'My dearest,' he said, 'such a joke!—actually old Fizz was right. There *was* a will.'

His wife looked up into his face lovingly, but with little inquiry in it.

'I mean—don't you remember?—Physic frightened you once with hinting that there had been a will made by Lambert that left everything to Jane and Alice. Well, there was such a will.'

'Yes, I knew it. But where is the joke?'

'Well, it's a grim sort of joke too, for I suppose it turns me out of Curgenven. But I haven't mastered the contents, only old Fizz did not speak without grounds as I supposed.'

'And the will——'

'Here it is. It has turned up. A cub of a nephew has come in for all Physic's property, and has found it, and brought it here. He understands nothing about it, all his thoughts are on horses.'

Percival put the will into his wife's hands, and she laid it unopened on her lap.

'I know its contents, Percy,' she said. 'It beggars you. You will have to begin the world again.'

'For myself I don't care, but for you, T.'

'For me?' She looked wistfully at him for a while, and then said, 'If I were young and strong, and this came on us,

I would not blink, but say, that at your dear side I would face the world. We would go somewhere—anywhere—together, and your hands and mine together would avail to find us bread. But now, Percy, it is too late. All my strength is spent, my confidence is gone.'

She turned the paper over and over with her wax-like fingers.

'Percy,' she continued after a pause, 'I knew about this, but you have little idea how I strove to obtain it, and what I did to get it.'

'Why, T.?'

'Why? Oh, I was so afraid of it being produced, when you, who are so happy here, and so completely now in the right place, would be thrown out with nothing.'

'My darling, I fall on my feet everywhere. I do not require much to be happy, so long as I have you and Justin.'

'You do not require much, but you do require something, and what have you got?'

He did not answer. In his careless manner he had not thought out the consequences to himself.

'And, T., darling, if you had got this will, what would you have done with it?'

'Burnt it.'

'Then I am glad you never did get it. That would not have been right.'

'But Jane would have nothing to say to it. Even the bribe of Curgenven would not induce her to accept the position as a condition for receiving it. Who was harmed?'

'That was not the question. It was Lambert's will.'

'Yes, Lambert's will.' She turned the paper over on her lap. 'I have read it through. It was written under the supposition that I was alive, and had made my presence known and felt. Not a word, from beginning to end, of love, of consideration for me. Not one farthing left to provide necessaries for his real wife, the woman he had sworn to cherish, for richer for poorer—whom he had vowed to endow with all his worldly goods. All was to go to the other woman, to indemnify her for the fraud he had committed on her, as if no fraud had been committed on me in deserting me, a poor young thing, in leaving me helpless in the world, and not asking even what became of me. I had no reason, Percy, to respect his wishes.'

'My dear, Lambert is dead.'

'Yes, he is dead.'

A pause ensued. She was looking straight before her into vacancy.

'It seems to me plain as daylight, T.,' said Percival. 'Old Lambert had this property left him unreservedly, and he could give it to whom he chose. He intended it to go to

Alice. That was his wish, and he had a right to leave it to her. Now I know that for certain, I will clear out whenever required. I can always accommodate myself to circumstances.'

She gave him back the will, and said—

'You, with your clear eyes, always see what is right. Yes, do as you think best. I was wrong, very wrong to meddle in the matter; but I did it for all your sakes. I loved you—not Jane—you and Justin.'

The servant tapped at the door.

'The rector and the dowager Mrs. Curgenven are in the drawing-room.'

'I will be down at once,' said Percival. 'Good-bye for a few minutes, T. I'll give old Pam and his daughter the will, and pack off young Fizz, then I will be up with you again.'

'I wish to see the rector and Jane.'

'They shall come with me.'

She held his hand.

'I am so sorry, so sorry, dear Percival. I have another great trouble for you.'

'Troubles do not oppress me greatly,' said Mr. Curgenven, and left the room.

As Percival entered the parlour, the rector stepped forward with a benignant smile: 'How are you, my dear Percival, and

how is your wife? I hear a bad account of her from every one. What is it? Has she caught a chill?'

'I have brought you something that will astonish you,' said Percival, not answering the questions. He caught an eager look in Jane Curgenven's eye, and thought, perhaps unjustly, that she was hoping the news relating to Theresa would be bad—had come there with the desire to hear she was in danger. Why, otherwise, that keen flash in her eye?

Percival was prejudiced, and he would not shake hands with her, or notice her; he spoke to her father alone.

'That old fellow, Physic, left his debts and his receipts, his bills and banking account, to a snob of a nephew who won't take on the business. This fellow has been rummaging in Physic's desks and cupboards, and has come on the paper that I hold. You shall look at it. Physic said something about it to me, but I thought it was all gammon, and gave it no great heed. However, here the document is. I have just shown it to Theresa. Physic had been scaring her with it, so she says. Look, it purports to be a will of Lambert, in which he leaves everything to Alice. I suppose it is all right. You take it and read it over between you. I have left the young Fizz in the breakfast-room with the spirit case open, and I must see to him.'

Then Percival left the apartment.

Mrs. Jane pursed up her lips and planted her feet flat on the carpet.

'Now then, papa, what is this?'

'My dear,' said the rector, looking at the paper which he held with one hand, whilst he combed out his whiskers with the other, 'it is just as I said; there was no doubt about it. Lambert had been married to—to—*her*.'

'He never was.'

'Of course, it is most dreadful to think it, and if I had had the very smallest suspicion——'

'Papa, never mind your suspicions, small or big. Read out that paper. Is it what Mr. Physic hinted about—a will that cast abominable reflections on me?'

'It is, my dear Jane, a will—— Excuse me till I look it over.'

'Well, look it over then, and when you have done that, pass it on to me.'

The rector, with a face very blank and combing vigorously with one hand, read the will. It was not long, and could be run through in half a minute.

'Well, papa?'

'Well, my dear, it is as I said. I really don't know what to say. We shall have to come to some arrangement with Percival. The thing must not be talked about. I would not

for a thousand pounds that it should get out that you had not been properly married.'

'I was properly married. You married me yourself.'

'Yes, dear, but then the first wife was alive.'

'She was not alive.'

'My dear, she really was. Here she is now—Percival's wife.'

'She never was Lambert's wife.'

'My dear, really you cannot maintain that. I wish, with all my heart, that it could be proved she had been his—his—the other thing, you know—and not his wife. That would have been a great comfort, a great consolation. But, you see, what with the register——'

'That was a forgery.'

'And with this will, signed by Lambert himself, there can be no doubt about it, no doubt whatever. He calls you by your maiden name, Jane Pamphlet, otherwise known as Jane Curgenven. It is very shocking, and to happen in my family it is almost sacrilege; and it will, should it become public, materially interfere with my ministerial influence and efficacy. How can I, you see, Jane, reprimand in cases, unfortunate cases——'

'Now, never mind all that, papa. Do you mean to tell me you believe this abominable paper to be a genuine document?'

'Of course it is. There is Lambert's signature—I know it very well—and it was witnessed by old Roger Morideg and also by Pike. The paper is perfectly genuine. There, also, is Lambert's seal with the Curgenven arms.'

'Let me see it.' Jane snatched the will from her father, and ran her eye hastily over it.

'Good gracious! Oh, Jane! Oh, goodness! My dear Jane!' Suddenly the rector whirled about on his heels and faced a landscape in oils hanging on the wall. 'This is certainly by Jeffrey. I know his style—these pale cobalt blues and creamy shadows, and his foregrounds always weak. I could swear to that tree—so blotchy, and no particularization about the rocks in front. Yes, certainly by Jeffrey.'

Then in came Percival.

'Will you both come up to Theresa's room?' he asked. 'I've packed off that little snob, sent him with Justin to look at the stables. Now then, come along, and bring the will with you.'

'The will!' gasped the rector. 'Ahem! Percival, I've been studying this landscape. It is by Jeffrey, is it not?'

'The will?' said Jane, in defiant tone. 'There is no will.'

'Lambert's will I left with you.'

'That!' sniffed Jane—'that insolent document! It was a fabrication by Physic.'

'Never mind, I must have it.'

'You can't. *I've eaten it.*'

'Eaten it!'

'Every shred, every letter, and the sealing-wax as well.'

CHAPTER XVI.

ONCE MORE 'INVENI PORTUM.'

Percival introduced the rector and his daughter into Theresa's room. Jane was startled and shocked at the change that had taken place in the wife of the Squire of Curgenven, and with a qualm at her heart she regretted certain bitter feelings she had of late yielded to and harsh words she had expressed. The greenish hue about the mouth, the wax-like whiteness, told a tale that could not be misunderstood. Theresa's eyes seemed extraordinarily large and dark, but they lacked the lustre usual in them.

The rector was the first to approach her and hold out his hand. Theresa, however, did not take it.

'I will not,' she said, in a low tone. 'I would have you first know what I have to say. You are not aware to whom you offer your hand. If, after what you have heard, you care

to give it me, I will take it with gratitude. I have been engaged——'

She pointed to the little table at her side, where she had been writing; a sheet of paper was thickly covered with characters.

'It is not now I have done it. I saw it must come. I have written a little one day—or night, then a little more. It is done now, all but my signature, and that I wish to add whilst you are here, that you may know what I have to confess.'

'To confess!' said the rector, with a quiver in his voice. 'I'm not a party man. I particularly object to anything that may be said to savour, to—to wear an aspect—to——'

'But really, papa,' said Jane, in a hard voice, 'really, papa, there is nothing to alarm you in this. It is a written confession, I understand, she wishes to have witnessed.' In an undertone she said, 'Papa, do be sensible. It is all coming out now about that affair with Lambert. I knew it would.'

'My dear, it is an affair I wish to hear nothing about. It cannot be wholesome. I never allow myself to hear of anything that might not come out of or go into *Peep of Day*, or *The Dairyman's Daughter*, or any other very good work suitable for children and bedridden old women.'

'Papa, you really must. It is to save my reputation.'

'But—but—if people talk, *my* reputation will suffer.'

'Papa, I insist.'

'My dear, if it must be! Oh, I wish I had never come here!' Combing his whiskers with both hands, he stepped slowly towards Theresa, and said resignedly:

'Well, what is it, then, my dear Mrs. Curgenven?'

'Mrs. Percival,' was the correction thrown in by Jane.

'I feel,' said Theresa, slowly, as a faint colour came to her cheeks in two spots, 'I feel that the time has come when it is my duty to tell all I know.'

'My dear T.,' Percival was at her side, 'can you not put this off to some later period. You really are not strong enough to bear anything that may excite you. Tonks said you were to be kept quiet; I was to amuse you, but not worry you.'

'It would worry me, Percy, if I were not allowed to speak. I have felt convinced for some little time that all efforts to conceal the truth were in vain. That faithful, devoted girl, Esther, has done what she could.'

'That has nothing in the world to do with it,' said Jane bluntly.

Theresa turned and looked at her.

'How, nothing?'

'Nothing with that affair of Lambert.'

'I do not understand you. Esther knows all about the death of Mr. Physic.'

'We know that very well,' said Jane; 'and now I am glad to hear she has been arrested. High time! In our nineteenth century—to give the police the slip! It was preposterous. They did not half look for her.'

'I hear that she is under arrest, and charged with the murder of Mr. Physic,' said Theresa.

'Yes, it is so.'

'She was not guilty. She had nothing to do with it. She held his horse at a distance, that is all.'

'But how can you tell, T.?' said Percival. 'My dear, what is the meaning of this? If Esther be innocent, of course she will be discharged. You need not fret yourself about her.'

'She must be discharged. She had no hand in it whatever. She drew suspicion to herself to save me.'

'*You*, T.?'

'Yes. I had done her a little kindness. She is a warm-hearted, grateful creature; and to draw away suspicion from me——'

'But, my dear T., suspicion could not possibly attach to you! You were ill at home, confined to your room.'

'I was there—for all that; I was there, on the moor at Tolmenna.'

'It is not possible!'

'It is true. I took the pistol from the bungalow, I——'

'Stay, stay!' cried the rector; 'I will hear no more. This is most dreadful. I would not for the world! There would be so much talk. It—it might interfere——' He ran to the window, seized the curtain and wrapped it round his head, muffling eyes and ears. Through the folds could be heard a mutter of words, but whether these were 'advancement' or 'ministerial efficacy' could not be distinguished.

Jane Curgenven went after her father.

'Papa, be reasonable. Do pay attention. You must come out of that.' She endeavoured to unwrap his head, but the more she strove to release him the further he wound himself up, till his head resembled a vast cocoon of a silk-worm.

Finding her efforts unavailing, and unwilling to lose a word of what was being said by Theresa, she turned back to the chair of the sick woman. Theresa looked round with a face full of distress and plea for mercy.

'I shot him!' she said.

A dead silence ensued. Percival and Jane were too much astonished to speak. Neither quite believed that Theresa was in her senses. They thought that she was labouring under an hallucination.

'I knew that he had that will. I did not wish my dear, dear husband to be thrown out of Curgenven to struggle with the world for a livelihood. For myself, I could not face the prospect. I was weary, weary to death of the voyage against contrary winds; beaten, battered by storm. I had not the strength, not the self-confidence, not the courage. I—I could not, no, I could not go back to what had been. Alone it would have been bad, but with Percival worse. Mr. Physic offered to sell me the will for the family jewels.'

'Not those diamonds of Lady Margaret's?' gasped Jane.

'The family jewels,' repeated Theresa. 'I could not give them up, and yet I could not let him keep the will. I tried to frighten him. I can't tell you all—it is written here. I have put it in this paper at length. But I solemnly assure you I did not know the pistol was loaded; I thought merely to threaten Mr. Physic. You, Mr. Pamphlet, advised me——' She looked round. 'Where is the rector?'

'Never mind, he can't hear,' said Jane; 'that is to say, he doesn't choose to hear.'

'I thought it was the last blast of the storm, and then I would be at peace. I was weary—I wanted rest. I—I never meant it—I——'

'Theresa, dear, do not distress yourself,' said Percival, going to her. She was sinking in her chair. The slight

colour had gone out of her cheeks. She was death-like in her whiteness.

'Will you take my hand, Percy? there is blood on it. But I never, never meant to kill him. It was rest from care and battle that I wanted. I had fought and toiled all my life. Every one was against me; no, not every one, you loved me.'

Percival seated himself on the elbow of her chair, put one arm round her to hold her up, and clasped her hand.

She was silent for some while, breathing heavily, and gathering her failing, scattered senses.

'Percy, where is the table?'

'Here, love.'

'I want to sign it all.'

'I pray you be calm, and do not concern yourself about it.'

'I must do it. Esther is in prison.'

'No, not in prison, dear.'

'She is very ill, and the police have taken her. Give me the pen—where is it?'

She turned in her chair and groped for the paper and pen; her sight was failing.

'Have you dipped it? Hold me, Percy; hold me up whilst I write.'

She took the pen and bowed her head over the paper on which she had written the story of what she had done.

Jane drew near and watched eagerly.

Theresa was writing laboriously; she seemed not to be able to see the letters she was forming. Then her head sank upon the table, and she lay heavily on Percival's arm.

'Oh, Jane,' gasped he, 'she has fainted!'

'She is dead!' said Jane, and drew the paper from under the white face, and looked for the signature. It was not there. In straggling characters the words were written, and still were wet: '*Inveni portum.*'

CHAPTER XVII.

THE RIGHT MEN IN THE RIGHT PLACES.

'Of all the owls that inhabit the British Isles,' said Justinian, 'commend me for sheer owlishness to the police force and the magistracy—present company excepted,' he conceded, waving his hand towards his father. 'I may add, a British coroner and jury. In the first place, these latter found that old Physic had been shot by Esther, and now these former have proved that she did nothing of the sort. If they had stopped there, it would have been well—but they have gone on to declare that he shot himself.'

'Why, Justin, old fellow, that was your own theory.'

Justinian was a little staggered. It had been his theory, and he had proclaimed the police owls for not adopting his view. However, he speedily recovered his self-satisfaction and balance, and said, 'Yes, till I knew better or worse, as you like to take it. It was not my profession or duty to investigate

the matter, and on a superficial acquaintance with it, I came to that conclusion which a sound intelligence would arrive at on such data; but when I began to go into the matter, then I speedily found it wouldn't wash. I gave my evidence sharp and to the point—not a word too much. Just what I was asked and no more. Had I observed the pistol hanging in the rack an hour before the fatal affair? I had. What opportunity had I for arriving at this conviction? The best: I had gone into the bungalow to fetch my gun. Where had I gone with my gun? To Cartuthers, to Sir Sampson's. He had a shooting party—only rabbits. Anything more? "Nothing more, thank you," from the bench. So I left the box. Aunt Jane went through her performance, I must say, though I don't like her, well. She had jumped to conclusions on wrong premises, no doubt about it. She had jumped to conclusions hastily, and it was all her doing that the coroner found what he did, or he and the jury, rubbing their stupid noddles together. She got out of it very well. She said just what was wanted, and no more. She told how Esther had come bouncing down on her with the pistol, and had said that with it Physic had been shot. At once, as she admitted, she had rushed to the conclusion that Esther had done the deed; she now admitted that the conclusion was hardly justified. Esther had not exactly said she had done the deed, but that

the pistol had done it, a statement quite compatible with the theory that he had shot himself.'

'And then, I suppose, the lodge-keeper was put in the box?'

'No, dad, that fellow Pike next, and he made mental prancings and buck-jumping. He involved himself in all kinds of contradictions, and the bench—Sir Sampson was chairman—had to warn him. I don't think he meant any harm, but that he was intellectually incapable of giving a straight answer. There you have the difference between culture and absence of culture. Whereas I——'

'Yet you deceived the bench just as much as he.'

'I, gov.? Not I. I said what was true—true down to the ground. Had they asked me whether my step-mother had had any finger in the matter, I should have been proud to say what I knew; I could not tell a lie even to save the reputation of the Curgenven family. But not a trace of a suspicion entered their obfuscated noddles that she was out that day, and had met Physic at Tolmenna. Unasked I was not going to tell them—not I. The Curgenven name must not be stained; besides, it was of no use now the dear mother is no more. I would spare her memory as I would save our name. Everything came out pat and to the point. The lodge-keeper had seen Physic ride his cob in at the gates. The butler had

answered the door when he came to inquire how Mrs. Curgenven was. He told the butler it had reached him that she had had a fit; Turbot did not send up to inquire, but answered offhand, that his lady was slightly better, but confined to her room. Then the keeper saw him near the bungalow. The next thing heard of him was that he was shot at Tolmenna. He was going to open a mine there, you know. Well, dad, it came out before the bench that old Physic's affairs were in a very bad state, and that there was going to be an inquiry into the way in which he had managed the Camden property. It seems probable that this frightened him. He dared not await exposure. Since his death, frauds have been detected. Then Esther must have seen him shoot himself; she was awfully droll at the petty sessions. There was no getting a word out of her. That is to say, she kept on repeating, "I'll die game, I shan't speak nothing," and she kept her word. Sir Sampson, and the rest of the bench, thought she was an idiot or a savage, and gave her up in despair. But they did not in the least believe, after the evidence, that she had shot Physic, and so they discharged her.'

'How is the poor girl?'

'She is better. She has been awfully ill, but she is picking up now. The Tregaskis family, brother and sister, have been good to her, and keep her with them until she is quite

recovered; but they say she is impatient to be back on the moors again.'

'Justinian, old boy, there is a matter I want to talk over with you, but I haven't had the heart since my dear T.'s death.'

'Governor, at the petty sessions the bench, I believe, passed a resolution of condolence with you on your loss.'

'That's all very fine, but why did not their wives come and call on T.? It was the doing of that Jane, I am convinced. I do not know what Jane said, or left unsaid, but she set all the women against her. Dear T. felt it—felt it keenly; it half broke her heart, I am sure of it. Now you'll see—after about six months they'll come calling, or making their husbands come to visit me. I'm disengaged now, and may be captured. In vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird; and not one of those women who turned up their noses at my T. shall set foot in this house if I can help it. That's my last word. Justin, I give you full leave to shoot me if I go from it. No, put me in an asylum, I shall be fit for that if I so far forget what is due to her dear and honoured memory. Justin, old chap, it has been my lot to have at my side two of the best of women, and both Bohemians, as I suppose society would label them. Admirable women both; 'pon my word, Justin, I was not worthy of either.'

'What is it that you wanted to consult me about?' asked Justinian.

'Oh, I forgot! It is this, boy. I gave you a sort of rough idea of how matters stood about the property. I'm hanged if I think I have any right to be here, and yet what am I to do? Jane will have none of it. I told you the reason. Besides, she has eaten the will. How she got it down I can't think. And there was a seal too, the Curgenven arms. But a woman of that sort will do anything—has the stomach of an ostrich and the conscience of a giraffe. What is to be done? I don't feel that in honour I ought to be here—and yet legally I am squire—that is, without the eaten will. Really, the place belongs to Alice, or will belong to her when she is of age. I can act as trustee. I believe old Lambert did want me and Jane to be the trustees, but then, when Alice is of age, I shall be bound in honour, I feel, to clear out and make way for her, and of course she will be snapped up by some young fellow, and I must find some other berth.'

'Oh! you need not concern yourself, governor. I am glad you have consulted me, and I happen to be the person—the only person—who could put you to rights. I am going to marry Alice.'

'You, Justin!'

'Why not? It is all settled between us. I shall be of age

next year, and Alice eighteen, so we can be married right off then. You can have the bungalow fitted up for yourself, or stay here with us—just as you like. You will be most heartily welcome. Always a knife and fork for you, gov.'

'Upon my word——'

'That settles every difficulty.'

'Upon my word, I'll have you on the Commission as soon as ever you are of age. By George! you'll be a model J.P., and Chairman of Board of Guardians, and all that sort of thing. The square man in the square hole at last.'

'Papa, really I cannot conceive how you could do it?'

'Do what, my love?'

'Preach a funeral sermon on that woman.'

'My dear, I could not help myself. She was squiress, and if I had not done so, people would have talked.'

'I could not have done it.'

'I dare say not, my dear. But, Jane, you are not in my place, have not my responsibilities. I have been ordained, and set apart for the special office and function of giving no offence to any man, that the ministry be not blamed, and I flatter myself that I do my duty. I give offence to none. Besides, in the matter of the funeral sermon, I dealt in generalities.'

'The text itself was outrageous. I turned white and red.'

'The text was perfectly harmless. "Who can find a virtuous woman? her price is above rubies." It was a question. If that were turned into Latin, one would be in difficulties. For if a *num* were employed, it would at once imply that no such person was to be found. Happily our language is sufficiently vague to allow of leaving the question open.'

'But it *did* imply that she was a virtuous woman, and that is precisely what you know she was not.'

'I know nothing. Whatever may have been said whilst my head was wrapped up in the curtain, I, of course, cannot tell. Knowing nothing, I could use that text; and even if I had known anything against her, by throwing the stress of my voice on *can* and *virtuous*, I could have implied, had I chosen, that she was not all she might have been. But I did not choose—I could not offend Percival. And Justinian is just as peppery and ready to fire up at a word of disparagement of his step-mother as is Percival.'

'If I had known you were going to preach that sermon, I would not have gone to church. How about a monument in the Curgenven aisle? You will not allow that?'

'I cannot refuse.'

'Then charge treble fees.'

'Nor can I do that legally.'

'Then insist on seeing the inscription. And, for mercy's sake, have no fibs on that; and no texts of Scripture exalting the deceased into being a saint. That, at least, you can legally prevent.'

'Percival has been to me already about the monument, and has written out what he thinks a suitable inscription. Here it is.'

Jane Curgenven ran her eyes over the paper her father presented to her.

'Well—the dearly beloved wife—I suppose he did care for her. There are queer tastes in the world. And for the text, what is that? It is Latin.'

'Yes, *Inveni portum:* I have found harbour.'

Jane returned the paper. 'It will do; but, papa, how could you take the text you did, with its allusion to the jewels?'

'My dear, why not?'

'The jewels, papa; why surely you have not forgotten? The Curgenven jewels lost—made away with. It is monstrous. She had some cock-and-bull story to account for their disappearance, no doubt. The fact is, the jewels are gone—made away with. Were they pawned? Were they sold? Who pocketed the money? You may depend upon it there is some ugly story behind the disappearance of the jewels. Lady Margaret Curgenven's diamonds gone! It is too hor-

rible. I wish to goodness now I had not left them at the house. I thought I was in conscience bound to do so, and I did it. Now they are all gone, and you talked of jewels in connection with her and her virtue in church. Really, papa, there is a limit to charity.'

'My dear, I made no definite statement. I never do, I envelop all I say in a cloud of generalities, or take the edge off everything that appears to be a definite statement by qualifications with "but" and "if." I trust that no one can say that I have ever, in my long ministerial career, given any one anything that he could lay hold of. And—but here come the letters.'

The Rev. Mr. Pamphlet opened the first.

'My dear, here is my reward. An archdeaconry and canonry. I really do think I have deserved them, and that I shall be the round man in the round hole.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

'CIVILIZATION BE BLOWED.'

THE bells were pealing. A twelvemonth was past, and Justinian was married to Alice.

The rectory was crowded with friends and acquaintances. To attend at breakfast the butler Turbot and a footman had been brought from the Hall. The Venerable the Archdeacon strutted about in gaiters and corded hat, bowing, smiling, saying agreeable things to every one. He had hopes that if he remained absolutely colourless, his teaching absolutely insipid, the way was open to him to become a bishop.

'Well, Percival, a proud day for you, to see your son and heir married. How are you? You don't look over cheerful.'

'Hang it, Archdeacon, no! I can't forget T. It would have pleased her.'

'You must not look back. By the way, you'll be gratified to hear that Mrs. Jordan has joined the Church. Since I have

given her my washing, she has left the Particular Baptists, and is now regular in her attendance on my ministrations.'

'I say, my dear Archdeacon, what is the tale I hear about Tregaskis?'

'I really cannot inform you. The man has not attended my humble ministrations for some time, and I hear is leaving, or being turned out of the police force. I have visited him, and I regret to say that I found him in a condition of demoralization very painful to contemplate. Demoralization is, perhaps, too strong a term, but what I mean is resentment against—recalcitration against everything that I and Jane and all right-thinking people cherish. I mean our nineteenth-century civilization, that network of silk that enfolds and, perhaps—well, perhaps embarrasses us, but it is for our good. I said something to him on the advantages of civilization, and his response was neither elegant nor grammatical. He said civilization be——I cannot complete the sentence. To repeat what is neither elegant nor grammatical might interfere with my minis—I mean my archidiaconal weight. It was something that is done to soap-bubbles. Who is that? What is that noise, Turbot?'

'Beg pardon, Mr. Archdeacon, there's Esther Morideg has come in at the front door, right in among the gentlefolks, and never rung nor nothing. She says that she wants—Mr. Arch-

deacon—to see Miss Alice. I beg pardon—meaning Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven.'

'What is that? What is that?' exclaimed Jane, who was near; then in her energetic, determined manner she rushed into the hall, and there found Esther making her way through the guests, in spite of the remonstrances of John Thomas, the footman.

'I reckon I'm as good a friend o' Miss Alice as any o' these fine folk here,' said the girl. 'Where be she? I want to speak wi' she, and I've gotten sum'ut for she too.'

'Esther, what's the meaning of this?' exclaimed Mrs. Jane Curgenven. 'This is intolerable. In at the front door! If you want anything, go to the back. But, you are not wanted. This is no place for you, and I can't have you bothering the servants either—they are all engaged.'

'Yourn't going to turn me out o' this as you turned me out o' the park at the school treat!' said Esther, defiantly. 'I be growed big since then.' She tossed her shoulders. 'I know this, I wi'n't go. I wi'n't go till I ha' seed Miss Alice. Her and I be fast friends, and I ha' gotten sum'ut for she.'

'What is that? Why, goodness——' Jane tried to snatch a box from under Esther's arm. 'That's the Curgenven jewel-case. Esther! what right have you to that? Where did you get that?'

'Where I got 'n, and how I got 'n, is naught to you. I'm bringing it for Miss Alice.'

'Give it to me at once, I insist. That box has been lost for a twelvemonth—it was made away with. You stole it. I'll have you summoned. Give it up to me instantly.'

'I wi'n't,' said Esther, defiantly. 'Why should I? I'll give it, I reckon, to Miss Alice—her's the true Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven now. The butler chap said so. I reckon you've no more to do wi' it than he has. I'll gi'e it to the proper Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven, and none other.'

At that moment Alice, in her travelling dress, descended the stairs. In a moment she saw Esther, and came to her with both hands extended. 'My dear Esther! I am so delighted. You, too, have come to wish me happiness. That was the only thing wanting to make me quite happy. Come along with me up-stairs, and I will show you all the pretty things that kind friends have given me.'

She led Esther away out of the throng to her room.

'Now, Esther,' she said, 'sit down and tell me all about yourself. You are quite well again now?'

'Yes, I reckon I'm just as I was. And see here, Miss Alice, I've brought you all the Curgenven diamonds and pearls, and other beauties. They was lost, but I had 'em. And yet I'd clean forgot all about 'em. You know I was cruel bad wi'

fever, and then I dun' know, I niver gave a thought to 'em, till I heard as you was a-goin' to be married, and then all to once they jumped into my head. I had 'em all under a floor-stone to Tolmenna. I reckon there ain't one lost. No one niver has touched 'em since I put 'em there. There, that's brave, on your weddin' day I can give you a better present than all them beautiful things the grand folk ha' given you.'

'And you wish me all happiness, dear Esther.'

''Ees, I reckon I do. It's I, too, as made it all come about. Didn't I put your hands together through the hole at Tolmenna? Well, folks as ha' done that, they're sure joined more nor any parson or registrar can make 'em. That be how Tregaskis and I is goin' to be married.'

'Esther! Tregaskis going to marry you? The constable!'

'No—I reckon it's I be going to marry Tregaskis. But he's no constable no more, soas!'

'What, has he left the force?'

'I'll just tell 'ee all about it,' said Esther, seating herself. 'Tregaskis be cruel sweet on me; he hev' took a fancy to I ever sin' I were i' fever i' his sister's and his house. I can't blame him. He ain't a bad 'un now he's seed the error o' his ways, and found liberty.'

'What do you mean, Esther?' Alice had some little acquaintance with the quaint revivalist cant that pervades all

the working-classes in Cornwall, but she did not see how this exactly applied to the constable. 'Sure Mr. Tregaskis has always been a most exemplary man.'

'He's been terrible under the law, as folks say,' answered Esther. 'But I'm right glad to say now, Miss Alice, he's found liberty.'

'But, my dear Esther, I do not understand you.'

'It's easy though,' said the moor-girl. 'When Tregaskis told the sergeant he were going to be married to I, then they kicked up such a bobbery. They said it would bring disgrace on the force, and they—that's the sergeant and the superintendent—wouldn't have it, and they'd have Tregaskis moved off somewhere to the hinder end o' Cornwall. Well, Tregaskis wouldn't stan' this, and so it come about that it was he must go out o' the force, or do without I; and nat'rally he couldn't do that, so he's no more a perleceman, and under the law. And he says he's cruel glad, and feels lighter and easier already; it's like a burden lifted off his heart. He had to be always on duty, and walkin' the rounds night and day, meeting other perlece, and all for no good at all. And then he was that tight squedged up i' his uniform, and his poor head boxed up i' a sort of helmet. It were the bondage of Egypt. But he's found liberty now, and is out o' it all.'

'But what is Tregaskis going to do?'

'Nothing, that's just it,' answered Esther, cheerily. 'Gran'-fer, and he, and I be a-goin' to build up Tolmenna once more. It seems old Lawyer Physic hadn't no proper title to the land, or sum'ut's gone wrong, and I reckon nobody knows exactly whose it is, or p'r'aps it be gone back to the lord o' the manor. Anyhow, us is goin' to tumble the old place together again; us can do it in a couple o' days.'

'Yes, that is all very well; but for a livelihood?'

'Us don't want a terrible deal on the moor—no more nor does long cripples' (snakes), 'or horniwinks' (peewits). 'But it'll make gran'mother easy i' her mind; you know her couldn't die i' peace wi'out giving up her secret to somebody, and her'll give it to Tregaskis, and I reckon he'll pick up a shilling or so in charmin' warts, and tellin' fortunes, and strikin' king's evil, and blessin' wounds, and staunchin' blood and so.'

'But, Esther, this is a wonderful change in Mr. Tregaskis—a policeman to become a white-witch.'

''Ees, I reckon it be,' said Esther, in a tone of triumph. 'But he sez, sez he, wi' a crow like a cock, "Civilization be blowed." He be a changed creature—that he be, I do assure you, miss; you'd say so, if you seed him now.'

'Why, what is he about now?'

'He's a-tearin' up o' his clothes, his uniform, you know, and he's chuckin' all the buttons with the crown on 'em into

Trewortha Marsh, where a twelvemonth agone he runned arter me, and tummled in, up to his chin, i' the bog water.' Esther went off into a fit of laughter. 'Bless y', Miss Alice, us be goin' to have a figgy' (plum) 'puddin' to our weddin', and us be a-goin' to bile 'n i' his helmet. The young squire said I was to tak' what sticks I liked out o' the Curgenven woods, and we'll bile our puddin' on them sticks and a few clots o' turf. 'Twill be brave.'

'The carriage is at the door,' said the servant, after knocking.

'Now really, Esther, I must go. Good-bye; give me a kiss.'

'You'll come and see me and Tregaskis, won't you?' pleaded the wild girl.

'Dear Esther, yes, but only on one condition—that you are married in church. Passing the hands through the hole in the stone may satisfy you and the ex-constable, but not me. Promise me that.'

'Very well, I'll do that just to oblige you,' said Esther, resignedly, 'but it's terrible like going under the law again. I'll do it. I'll tell y' somethin' more as 'll make y' laugh. Rainy days, and when us has got nothin' to do, Tregaskis and me 'll knock each other about the head wi' his truncheon, just for exercise, and to amuse gran'fer and gran'mother.'

'I really must go,' said Alice, and descended the stairs, attended by Esther.

'What, you still here!' exclaimed Jane. 'I thought I had ordered you out of this house. Really, Alice, you must not encourage this girl.'

'Now you leave she alone,' said Esther, 'it's no concern of yourn. And I tell y' I'll walk wi' my young man about i' the park, and nobody shall say "Get out" now. You ar'n't nothin'. Her's Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven.'

The carriage drove away, the slipper was thrown, rice was showered. The Archdeacon and Jane Curgenven stood in the drive looking after the carriage.

Jane uttered a little groan. 'I never, never thought *that*, or I never would have consented.'

'What, love?'

'That my child, that chit, should take precedence over me, and be Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven.'

THE END.

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